



테니스의 신

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God of Tennis

- 테니스의 신 -

- Volume 1 -

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[pineapple (Myoniyoni Translations)]

- STORY -

Thirty-three years old. A talentless tennis player for NK company with an unsuccessful career, Han Woo Jin. No matter how hard he tried, there was a limit to how much he could accomplish. Eventually, when the day for him to quit tennis had finally arrived, he was sent back ten years to the past with a system...

Prologue

Introduction

Han Woo Jin who was sitting in front of a computer inside a shabby room looked down at his racket with grim eyes. It had been with him for 20 years now.

‘I can’t remember how many times I’ve changed the strings.’

His racquet frame was still shiny because at the end of every game he played, he would rub it with his handkerchief. He got this racket signed by Ivan Lendl who won the French Open in 1984 on his parents’ honeymoon.

Ivan Lendl.

‘It is a name that I hate and love. He was the man who made me start playing tennis and he was a player that I admired.’ Han Woo Jin was born the same year that Evan won the French Open. So he had special feelings for this racket.

It was inevitable that he became a tennis player. ‘My parents were both huge tennis fans back then. They were a couple that gave their young son a racket and a tennis ball.’ Even Han Woo Jin himself couldn’t help but fall deeper into the charm of tennis.

However, Han Woo Jin’s tennis career wasn’t smooth sailing. Despite his hardest efforts, his skill remained at a standstill.

‘I practiced tennis for eight hours a day, and my hands were blistered because I held the racket for too long.’

Han Woo Jin believed that his effort would be rewarded in the future and continued playing.

It was good that he was able to get into NK company at 23 years of age. Han Woo Jin finally began thinking that his hard work was beginning to pay off.

Unfortunately, his play record was poor during the few years he played for the company. His teammate was greatly supported by the company and was able to reach

4th place in the Korean Tennis championship, winning a monetary prize reward. Yet he received no chances from the company.

But he didn't give up. He was still young. He could still do more. As he repeated these words to himself, he kept on playing tennis.

“In the end, it ends like this.”

He was now thirty-three years old and this was the end of his career as a professional tennis player. He was a player that never won a single domestic reward. NK company was burdened by him for ten years. He never showed them any special talent.

“Choi Yeon Hyuk.”

His teammate lived in a completely different world than him. He was the main character of success that placed as the runner-up (2nd place) in the Wimbledon, which was one of the four major tennis tournaments in the world. He was considered a national hero of tennis in Korea and was known as the king of tennis in newspaper interviews.

‘I mocked him after reading the newspapers for getting second place and not first. However, what I should have laughed at was my own ability that was not even comparable to his.’

Was it talent? Han Woo Jin's talent seemed to have reached its peak when he joined NK at 23.

When the players practiced, he was the ball boy, picking up the balls. He only practiced when they all left. There weren't many people who practiced with him, so he practiced in the court alone.

“Woo Jin ah, you're not cut out to make a career as a player.”

“Coach Jun Sang Shik...”

‘If I listened to my coach's words to quit being a player and instead become a coach would it have been different? Maybe I would have avoided asking my parents for money for living expenses? Couldn't I have avoided looking incompetent in front of my sister during the holidays?’

Han Woo Jin touched the name of Ivan Lendl on his racket and carefully put it down. It was now time to say goodbye to his dream.

He turned on the computer screen and he went straight to the largest tennis blog. It was a website that had articles upon articles of where he had left many comments and read many stories. "I want to leave this in good hands. I used this racket for 20 years but it is still in good condition."

Han Woo Jin entered the used goods page and typed his ad. What should be the title?

He chose to write a title that would attract people's attention. Not just Koreans, but anyone that would be excited about things with celebrity autographs. Especially so for a world-class tennis player like Ivan Lendl.

[Selling a racket with Ivan Lendl's autograph]

It was a simple title. Han Woo Jin laughed at the screen. His 20 years were in vain. How many times did he get mocked for playing with that tennis racket with his skills by his teammates? 'At least I don't want to sell it to them.'

He got a reply in just five minutes. The person wanted to confirm the authenticity and asked for a picture that his parents took with Ivan Lendl.

They soon began a conversation.

Han Woo Jin accepted his message without thinking.

Prince of Wimbledon: Hello.

Woo Jin: Yes, hello.

Prince of Wimbledon: You're really selling it? You look like you're pretty attached to it, are you sure you don't want to think about it some more?

Han Woo Jin shook his head. It had already been decided. He had no talent for tennis. 'You'll be rewarded if you try hard.' That was only a proverb for those with talent.

Woo Jin. It's okay. I'm going to quit tennis.

Prince of Wimbledon: I see...

He was silent for a moment. He seemed to feel sympathy for Han Woo Jin who had stopped trying to make an effort.

Woo Jin: So are you going to buy or not? Please make a decision. I don't like beating around the bush.

That's what he did with tennis for most of his life. He berated himself for ten years as a player. Han Woo Jin let out a self-deprecating laugh as his eyes became wet. The man answered.

Prince of Wimbledon: I'll buy it. The racket.

Woo Jin: What do you think about the price?

Prince of Wimbledon: Mmm... I'm not sure.

The man seemed hesitant. A racket with the autograph of a world-famous player. Although it was used, it was still a precious item. If he sold it to Ivan Lendlmania he could have gotten several thousands of dollars. But Woo Jin really wanted to sell it to a tennis lover, which is why he posted the ad on this website.

He went to get water and the other side wrote a few more lines.

Prince of Wimbledon: It's not a big deal, but if you could make one wish what would it be?

Woo Jin: Do you have the dragon balls or something?

Han Woo Jin laughed instead of drinking the water. 'Wish. I didn't just want to win a competition or become a famous player. People dream of becoming famous celebrities, but what's the use of it?' Han Woo Jin typed his response.

Woo Jin: I... just want talent.

Prince of Wimbledon: Talent?

Woo Jin: Yes.

It is said that geniuses are made up of 99% effort and 1% talent. That is the truth. But even if you put in the 99%, you cannot achieve that 1%. Even tennis players need more

than that 1% talent. But there was a limit that Han Woo Jin could reach as a normal person.

Prince of Wimbledon: So how much talent do you want?

Woo Jin: Are you serious? Do you find this funny?

Prince of Wimbledon: Yes, well, I like it. Like IF...

IF. If that's the case. Everyone thinks *what if*. How many times have I thought to myself, *What if I was a talented player?*?

Woo Jin: I don't need much. I just wish I could have realized earlier on that I needed talent to be successful.

Prince of Wimbledon: That's simple.

That's simple. The sentence he just read from that man pierced his heart. He was a 33-year-old tennis player with no achievements. A man whose dreams and talents were simple. Han Woo Jin. The man continued typing.

Prince of Wimbledon: I'm fine with this. Are you willing to trade?

The conversation suddenly went back to the racket. Han Woo Jin unconsciously answered.

Woo Jin: Yes.

Three short taps and then enter.

That was the beginning.

Chapter 1

The First Test

“15! 30!”

Han Woo Jin was shocked by the sudden yelling. There was no one else in his studio. Who the hell was screaming? Strangely, his half-lit room was suddenly very bright.

“You there! Stay there!”

“Yes?”

He turned his head to see who had spoken and he saw a person pointing at him. His eyes immediately widened in surprise because he knew exactly who that person was. It was Jung Sang Shik; the manager who had asked him if he wanted to be a coach instead of a player.

“Ma-manager Jeon Sang Shik?”

“What?”

Jeon Sang Shik replied in a cold manner. It was a reaction as if he were seeing a person for the first time. The manager was rough and spoke coldly, and while the players worked hard, he was the hardest worker who actively tried his utmost for those players. He was also Han Woo Jin’s greatest benefactor that allowed him to stay on the team for ten whole years even with his poor record.

With a reminiscent face, Coach Jeon Sang Shik had a much younger face than he remembered, with less wrinkles. He couldn’t help but stare blankly at him.

“Why aren’t you saying anything after calling me? What’s your name?”

“I-I’m Han Woo Jin.”

“Alright, Han Woo Jin. I’ll remember you. Work hard.”

After saying those words, he walked with a serious face over to the coaches' bench area. Han Woo Jin blankly stared at Jung Sang Shik's back until someone woke him up from his daze with a pat on his shoulder.

"Han Woo Jin ssi, are you nervous?"

"Choi Yeon Hyuk..."

It was the main character of Wimbledon who was the runner-up of the tournament. Korea's Prince of Tennis still looked the same with the goofy smile on his face just like in the past. Han Woo Jin still couldn't come to terms with what was going on.

'What in the world happened? How did I suddenly move out from my single room while staring at my computer? Where is this place? What situation is this? Why is Choi Yeon Hyuk in front of me?'

Questions were running at light speed in his mind.

Choi Yeon Hyuk caught his words and stepped back a bit.

"Ah, we're not that close to be calling each other by our first names right? But you can call me by my name casually."

"Ah... it's whatever. You can call me Woo Jin."

He replied without thinking before realizing what he had done after hearing Choi Yeon Hyuk's younger voice as he looked at his surroundings.

"This... is the time for the entrance test for NK company."

It was different from what he remembered. He was very nervous back then and he just waited for his name to be called; he didn't talk to anyone. He had never spoken to Choi like that before. He also just realized that he was sitting next to him. Regardless of his confusion, the situation continued.

The examinees went forward as the coaches called their names and they would play against a random opponent. NK company's entrance examination was very famous for its uniqueness and harshness. They didn't have much time so they played only one set and then they would decide if they passed or not.

‘I remember my opponent wasn’t very good.’

Han Woo Jin didn’t even remember his opponent’s name that lost to him 6-3 even though Han Woo Jin didn’t play that well either. Thanks to that, he was able to join NK company quite easily and started to live his dream as a pro.

He suddenly thought of the man that wanted to buy the racket.

Prince of Wimbledon: It’s not a big deal. But if you wanted to make a wish, what would you wish for?

‘No way...?’

He tilted his head. ‘Meeting someone at an internet cafe sent me back 10 years back to the entrance exam? Is this possible?’

Han Woo Jin shook his head. After a while, he knew that his name would be called so he went to grab his racket.

“I-it’s gone!”

He let out a small scream. The racket with Ivan Lendyl’s autograph. He couldn’t find the racket that hadn’t left his hands since his childhood. As he was flipping through his bag, he recalled his words.

Prince of Wimbledon: That’s fine, so are you going to trade?

‘Did I pay for it with that racket?’

It was obvious that the price for being sent back 10 years into the past was the racket which was amazingly great for him but, he never expected for this to actually happen. It was a simple conversation on the internet, but then a sharp voice in his ear interrupted his train of thought.

“Han Woo Jin! Applicant Han Woo Jin!”

“Yes, yes!”

The other applicants laughed when they saw him raise his hand like a school student. He also went down to take the test but he didn’t bring a racket. Seeing his empty hands,

those behind him ridiculed him.

"He didn't even bring a racket? Is he going to take the test with one of those rackets that are lying around?"

"Wow, how confident. I want to do that."

"I don't know why he's so confident."

But Han Woo Jin wasn't listening to the conversations behind him. He was already confused enough and had no time to pay attention to them. However, Han Woo Jin decided to solve the problem that was already in front of him as he picked up one of the old rackets.

It was at that moment.

'...What is this?'

[Han Woo Jin]

Strength 48/ Stamina 45/ Dexterity 39

HP: 1730/1800 SP: 310/310

Forehand: 9/20

Backhand: 4/20

Serve: 8/20

Volley: 3/20

Smash: 7/20

Special Skill: None

'It feels completely different from what I see.' Han Woo Jin felt like these words being printed into his mind about his tennis skills weren't accurately portrayed. It was an objective numerical table that showed that Han Woo Jin had no forehand style, no reflexes, no usage of volleys, and only showed his most basic skills.

'If this is real... how come there isn't a drop shot or lob in the skillset? Is it because I haven't used it?'

Han Woo Jin's ability to measure distance deteriorated; therefore, he rarely used drop shots and lobs in his matches. Serving was a skill that one could become good at with enough time and practice. However, drop shots and lobs were useful when the player needed to adjust the distance and speed of the ball, so those moves weren't suited for Han Woo Jin.

Considering the unidentifiable status screen in his mind, Han Woo Jin turned to look at his opponent.

'Of course.'

He was able to see his opponent's stats across from him.

[Lee Jin Seob]

Strength 50/ Stamina 38/ Agility 32

HP 1330/1520 SP 210/210

Forehand: 4/20

Backhand: 3/20

Serve: 4/20

Volley: 3/20

Smash: 4/20

Drop Shot: 1/20

Lob: 1/20

Special Skill: None

'If he only has this much, I can easily win this.' Han Woo Jin was a person that never won anything despite the tremendous amount of effort he put in. Therefore, this

caused him to have low self-esteem. However, when facing an opponent when he had a clear advantage reignited his self-confidence.

Han Woo Jin got up and stretched his waist. His hand stopped trembling as he firmly gripped the practice racket. The countenance of the nervous looking student that he portrayed earlier was nowhere to be seen.

There was one person that saw his demeanor change.

‘...What’s wrong with that kid? If you look at him, he looks like he already has the aura of a pro.’

Coach Jeon Sang Shik clearly remembered the name and face of the rookie that called out to him earlier. As soon as he heard Han Woo Jin being called out to the court, he threw his gaze on over. Jeon Sang Shik observed the face of the young man that had no trace of anxiety.

To live as a professional player in the tennis world, one required a sponsor. If you were not from a wealthy family, you could always find a sponsor to support your athletic career.

In short, it was not an exaggeration to say that this examination was a test on whether you would become a pro or not.

Pros would often supervise these examinations.

Coach Jeon Sang Shik stared at Han Woo Jin with a complex expression.

‘It’s not like he’s overflowing with confidence but he’s not too nervous either. He looks like a veteran that’s played hundreds of matches.’

Coach Jeon Sang Shik wanted to find out more about Han Woo Jin and went through the player documents and applications. There was nothing impressive about his resume. He wasn’t particularly outstanding and didn’t seem to have much potential.

But he was the type that leaned towards seeing is believing rather than relying on paperwork. In the eyes of the coach, Han Woo Jin was someone that tickled his senses.

“Now, are both of you ready?”

The NK coach officiating the match asked if both of them were ready. Han Woo Jin and Lee Jin Seob both nodded their heads. They both knew the rules of the match for this exam.

“The game will only go on for one set. Please note that there will be no changing sides and no deuces. To decide who serves first, just do rock paper scissors.”

“Alright.”

“Yes.”

Han Woo Jin went scissors and Lee Jin Seob put out paper, so he decided to serve first. Momentum was very important in tennis and the serve was a very powerful tool that one could use to increase their advantage.

“Alright, then Han Woo Jin will serve first.”

Piik!

The referee blew the whistle.

At the same time, Han Woo Jin tossed the ball up.

Pang!

Han Woo Jin’s racket hit the ball in the air and the tennis ball flew to the other side of the court, right on the line. Maybe Lee Jin Seob didn’t expect a serve that fast but he didn’t move a single foot and let the ball go right past him. Han Woo Jin easily secured the first point.

“15:0!”

Han Woo Jin caught the ball that was thrown at him and went back into position. His confidence went up as he saw the first serve score without a problem.

‘I will win! An overwhelming victory!’

Although Han Woo Jin wasn’t a famous player in his past life, he played as a pro for ten years. Returning to his 23-year-old body didn’t mean that all his experience would just disappear. He was much stronger than he was before.

He threw the ball up once again in the air. It was a normal overhead stroke, but the serve was the most fundamental shot in tennis.

And Han Woo Jin was someone who was confident that he wouldn't lose to anyone in the basics.

Pang!

“Damn it!...”

Lee Jin Seob ran as soon as he saw Han Woo Jin hit the ball, but the ball was quicker this time and he failed to reach it. It was the second-serve ace.

“30:0!”

This was easy. His opponent couldn't even return his serve. From his physical fitness to his tennis skills, it was impossible for Han Woo Jin to lose.

Han Woo Jin's serves hit the other side of the court in rapid succession while Lee Jin Seob was unable to return a single one as he lost the match with a depressed look on his face.

“Game! Han Woo Jin!”

“Nice!”

How long had it been since he won such a one-sided match? Every time he won a difficult match by the skin of his teeth, earning such an overwhelming victory was an ecstatic feeling for him.

As if congratulating Han Woo Jin for his victory, a notification sound and notice popped up.

[Overwhelming victory! First time getting a service ace. Serve level rises by one.]

[Overwhelming victory! Because of your overwhelming victory, you have been awarded one stat point.]

The excited Han Woo Jin clenched his fist and suddenly stopped moving. He stared at the status window that appeared.

[Han Woo Jin]

Strength 48/ Stamina 45/ Agility 40

HP 1730/1800 SP 320/320

Forehand: 9/20

Backhand: 4/20

Serve: 9/20

Volley: 3/20

Smash: 7/20

Special skill: None

‘Did my skills improve just because I won one game? Or is it because I won such an overwhelming victory? Did my skills really change?’

Han Woo Jin clenched and unclenched his hands to see if anything actually changed, but there was no way of checking. He didn’t know how raising one level would affect him. Lee Jin Seob, who just lost the first game, watched Han Woo Jin look at his racket. He went up to him and said in a rude tone,

“Hey, let’s hurry up and play the next game?”

“Ah, sorry. Sure.”

Although his opponent spoke to him in a rough tone, Han Woo Jin didn’t blame him because he just lost a game.

After seeing that the two players were ready, the referee signaled for the next game to begin.

Piik!

‘I’m serving this time. See if you can take any of my serves!’

Lee Jin Seob hit the ball in the air as hard as he could. He had been weight training every day for a while now and he was confident in his own strength. As soon as he hit the ball, the ball was already over the net.

Yet as the ball crossed the net and was about to hit the other side of the court, a shadow was already in front of the ball.

‘What? He’s there already?’

Han Woo Jin was already standing in a receiving position in front of the ball as it bounced. It was simple to return as if his opponent was serving it to him on a dish. The ball, which was in a high state of velocity, was so quickly returned back that it furiously went back over the net and hit the other side of the court past Lee Jin Seob.

“0:15!”

He just performed a perfect Rising Stroke.

After being defeated by a service ace and now losing to a Return Ace, Lee Jin Seob’s face morphed into one of despair.

If you lost the game to your opponent’s serve then you can accept the fact that your opponent had a strong serve. But what if they had a strong return? And their returns happened to be a Rising Serve?

Unlike Lee Jin Seob’s face that was filled with defeat, Han Woo Jin’s face was blank.

‘I can do it! I can move exactly as I imagine! I can determine the way my opponent will serve and send the ball!’

He was able to read the trajectory of Lee Jin Seob’s serve. Although he was not confident in this ability, he was able to greatly succeed in his return. From a Rising to a return ace was fantastic even for Han Woo Jin.

The current game continued on like the previous game. Every single time Lee Jin Seob served, it was returned with a Rising which he was unable to hit.

In the end, Han Woo Jin was able to end the second game with only eight strokes combined from both players. At that moment, he heard a voice inside his head.

[Overwhelming victory! This was your first time performing a return ace in a game. Serve level increased by one.]

[Your serve level has reached level 10. A special skill has been created.]

[You have learned the special skill: 'Sparrow'].

For some reason, returning a serve with a Rising was correlated with the serve and increased his skill level. However, even though he won this game without losing a single point like the last, he didn't receive a stat point. 'I guess the achievement wasn't that big and you can't repeat actions to earn skill points.'

Han Woo Jin knew that nothing came easy in this world and he knew that he would have to work hard for more skill points until he suddenly focused on the special skill.

'What? Special skill?'

Serve level: 10/20

Special skill: Sparrow (Serve)

'Sparrow...?'

The name of this skill reminded him of a pirate from somewhere. Before he could find out what this skill could do, he first had to focus his attention back on the ball that Lee Jin Seob had hit towards him.

"Huh?"

"Let's hurry this up. You're going to win this anyway."

Lee Jin Seob completely lost all hope. He admitted his defeat with a deadpan expression and decided to keep on playing to avoid bad gossip about himself. At this moment, it looked as if a fire was burning in Han Woo Jin's eyes.

'...you lost the motivation to play just because you lost two games? Just because your opponent is a bit better than you?'

He knew his skill level very well. He knew that he was at the intermediate level, not even close to the advanced level. He also didn't have any specialties, so he always lost

because of that disadvantage. That's why he lived his previous life as an unsuccessful pro.

However, Han Woo Jin kept on playing until he was thirty years old and put in effort as if he were going to die. His wrist and elbow joints were worn down because he swung his racket too much. Some days he had to take pain killers because of how much his shoulder hurt since he forced himself to practice. To him, giving up was only an option after he took every action possible. 'I've given up on giving up, so I have to try harder.

'This examination was nothing more than showing your potential and what you can do to the coaches that are watching. The better you play and the more overwhelming your victory is, the higher your standing will be after the examination. When I recalled my past, I remembered that I was put in the contract with the worst possible conditions than anyone else.

'You are an experiment.'

Sparrow.

He had somewhat of an idea on how to use it. Perhaps that was because of the status window in front of his head.

Han Woo Jin stared intently at the tennis ball that he was holding and threw it up into the air.

•••

Jeon Sang Shik swallowed his saliva as he watched Han Woo Jin overwhelming win against Lee Jin Seob.

'He's exceptional. Isn't he even better than some of those new pros?'

He certainly was. Stable serve, footwork, and well-tempered body. His movements and everything else was derived from his experience when he was a player.

'His serve speed is 187 km/h. Not bad.'

They were able to use a speed gun to calculate the speed of his serve. His speed wasn't

the fastest but his serve was very textbook-like and the speed of his serve was average.

It wasn't just enough for Han Woo Jin to win a game with just service aces but to also win a game with just return aces so casually. Jeon Sang Shik swallowed his saliva once more.

'I might get some decent goods today.'

'No, not yet. What he's doing now, anyone can do after a few years of experience.'

It was a brutal yet true statement.

As Han Woo Jin continued to show his playstyle, Coach Jeon Sang Shik determined that his playstyle was very basic. He put his opponent in a tough spot and was able to read where his opponent would hit the ball. His playstyle was textbook.

But these were still the basics. Any pro could play like this. Even that idiot of a player of his opponent could play like him with a few years of practice.

There was one important thing that sponsors look for when they choose athletes.

Star quality.

'You need something special. Something that only you can do and no one else can copy.'

It was something that was necessary in order to attract attention from the audience. Having something extraordinary that makes you stand out from the other players in something you need in this type of industry. Of course, having solid skills are important and having a good win rate is also important. But all of that is insignificant in front of having a brilliant special skill/move.

For example, let's say that there is a soccer/football player who has a bad reputation for being bad at passing the ball. But what if he dribbled/handled the ball better than anyone else and single-handedly scored a goal? He would attract more attention and be a bigger star than the player who is the best at passing.

The way Coach Jeon Sang Shik saw it, Han Woo Jin was well qualified to become a pro player. However, he didn't have the attributes to become a star.

'It would be good if he had a special quality like Choi Yeon Hyuk who came before him.'

Coach Jeon Sang Shik though as he took a look at the large man next to him who was looking at the examination. At a height of 186 cm, with long arms and legs, he wins his games with service aces and is able to quickly return serves with his long legs.

He had horrible reflexes/reaction time but he had a powerful figure and he was quite handsome. Ever since we put Choi onto the team, whenever there was a match, female fans completely filled the audience seats.

He saw Han Woo Jin easily win his second match with return aces and his expectation of him rose.

'He might only be good in the beginning. He might be able to reach 8th or 4th place in a national tournament. That's his limit. The things that Han Woo Jin has shown so far is nothing special overall and there isn't much room for improvement. The level he's at is something that can be reached with hard work and that isn't something that can survive in the pro world.'

As soon as the coach made his decision about Han Woo Jin, it was at that moment that he saw something occur on the court.

Pang!

"Wh-what?!"

Coach Jeon Sang Shik abruptly got up from his chair which caused it to topple over. It made a commotion, but no one seemed to care.

The more surprising thing happened on the court.

Looking at the green ball that was falling in the air, Han Woo Jin was felt a strange sensation.

'...Is this the special skill?'

The moment when Han Woo Jin had the intention of using Sparrow, his body moved against his will. His foot naturally moved back, he gripped his racket, and he swung as he grunted.

As soon as the greenish-yellow ball was about 30 cm above his head, Han Woo Jin's body turned at a frightening speed that even he couldn't follow. His wrist snapped in

an incomprehensible direction as he swung his racket, and he was absolutely thrilled when he reached the end of the stroke.

Sparrow.

When he first heard the name of this skill...

Han Woo Jin's racket launched the greenish-yellow ball like a missile to the other side of the court.

Pang!

Fast and straight to the point. True to its name,...

"This is... the special skill!

'World-class athletes are able to perform feats that sometimes look inhumane! I myself can now do that!'

Lee Jin Seob, who was the one receiving the special technique, was confused. He was astonished by the speed of the ball, but then it suddenly moved even faster and the ball disappeared right in front of his eyes.

"Wha-what? Where did it go?"

Han Woo Jin's racket fired a green light that was going straight, but it suddenly curved and disappeared from his eyesight, hitting the ground. It was a near 90-degree change in direction! It was practically magic considering the amount of force you have to put on the ball for it to spin like that.

Even if you knew where the ball was going to land, you couldn't hit it. It was a magic ball.

Furthermore, the ball that was supposed to bounce back up after it hit the ground barely bounced back up at all and rolled past him.

Huh!?

The ball that was flying in the air was caught by the net in the middle of the court and fell to the ground. Lee Jin Seob, whose mouth was wide open, just watched the ball roll

on the floor.

It was silent for a while. Even the referee didn't announce the score as he too had his mouth wide open. The sound of the chair falling in the spectator area echoed as Coach Jeon Sang Shik stepped out in the silence.

Kudadang!

“Wh-what is that?”

He forgot to put on his usual grumpy face and his small eyes widened in shock. Han Woo Jin saw his expression was also surprised by his actions, but he couldn't help but laugh after seeing his face.

He didn't know the current Jeon Sang Shik, but in his previous life, he'd never shown that kind of expression before. He was now younger than before and not as mature. Jeon Sang Shik saw Han Woo Jin's laughing face and he immediately controlled his expression. This was very shocking for him also to have changed his expression.

‘...he is definitely the NK coach that makes the best tennis players in all of Korea.’

Coach Jeon Sang Shik was also the man that would be leading the tennis team ten years from now. The media and the press praised him as a veteran coach that cultivated Choi Yeon Hyuk. Han Woo Jin had a bitter taste in his mouth, because although the coach saved him from getting kicked off the team, he wasn't one of his most valuable players.

Woo Jin had no idea why but the coach was walking toward him in the noisy environment in a serious manner and shouted at everyone to be quiet.

“Quiet!”

Quiet... quiet... qui... et...

His voice echoed throughout the large indoor tennis court. The coach...

“Han Woo Jin, you pass. No need to finish your game. Wait until the rest of the games are finished. Okay?”

“Ah, yes Coach.”

Han Woo Jin knew that he would be accepted but he didn't expect it to happen in such a fashion. Therefore, he struggled to reply as he looked at the coach from head to toe.

It was strange that a player like him had feelings like the coach was more like his friend than a coach. Nonetheless, he was happy.

Jeon Sang Shik unconsciously looked at Han Woo Jin strangely as he smiled and put back the racket.

He turned his head and saw Lee Jin Seob walk towards the exit with his racket. Han Woo Jin turned his head. In sports, there were winners and losers. He won today. Tomorrow would be completely different. He could also end up losing.

Han Woo Jin went back to the waiting room where the other players had mocked him and those players that mocked him turned their heads as they couldn't face him. They knew that they had made a mistake earlier and did their best to be respectful to him now.

But Han Woo Jin never paid any attention to them from the beginning. He went back to the seat that he sat in before. At that moment,

“Wow, Woo Jin, you’re pretty good!”

“Eh? Th-thank you.”

Choi Yeon Hyuk came up to him and tapped his shoulder. Han Woo Jin surprised by his actions, and that made him stutter. He was the Choi Yeon Hyuk who would become the genius that would place 2nd in the Wimbledon tournament even though he didn't know it now. He never had never spoken to him before. Maybe the previous Choi Yeon Hyuk never even knew that Han Woo Jin existed at all.

Han Woo Jin didn't know what to say but his eyes shined brightly.

‘I wonder what the future 2nd best player in the world’s stats are right now?’

In order to find out his stats, he needed one thing.

“Yeon Hyuk, you finished your exam right?”

“I already finished earlier. My opponent gave up, so I didn't even get a decent warm

up."

He didn't remember the opponent but Han Woo Jin felt pity for him. Choi Yeon Hyuk was monstrously strong ever since he entered the company. He was a genius at serves, volleys, drop shots, lobs, everything.

'This is expected.'

As soon as he grabbed ahold of the racket, he was able to see Choi Yeon Hyuk's stats.

[Choi Yeon Hyuk]

Strength 57 / Stamina 60 / Agility 62

HP 2280/2400 SP 640/640

Forehand: 11/20

Backhand: 8/20

Serve: 9/20

Volley: 11/20

Smash: 9/20

Drop Shot: 8/20

Lob: 8/20

Special skills: ??? (volley)

He was a monster.

That was the first thing that popped up in Han Woo Jin's head. His serve level went up by two because of his previous match, and the total of all his skill levels was 33. However, Choi Yeon Hyuk's total skill level exceeded 60. In addition to that, two of his skill stats were at 9 and one was even at 10!

'Ha... I'm not that great.'

Han Woo Jin was determined. He came back ten years from the future without knowing anything. He was just excited that he got another chance to become even better at tennis, but meeting him felt like he suddenly got dumped by a bucket of cold water which brought him back to his senses. Although Choi Yeon Hyuk was supposed to be the 2nd place in the future, he was still a genius, even now. It was truly laughable that he believed himself to be amazing since he came back to the past when there was someone like Choi Yeon Hyuk in front of him.

“That person said that I would be rewarded for my efforts.

‘Then I will do my best. I’ll put in more sweat and effort than the previous ten years of my life.’ Choi Yeon Hyuk played a big role in awakening Han Woo Jin’s life without even knowing it. He was just overwhelmed by the look of Han Woo Jin’s eyes when he saw him gripping his racket.

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The examination continued well after Han Woo Jin caused a stir. There was laughter and sobs as the losers quickly packed their things and left. There were other companies than NK anyway. Those that couldn’t pass the examination quickly gave up and decided to search for another agency.

When the test was finished, the number of people had decreased by half. Coach Jeon Sang Shik stepped up.

The players who remembered seeing him yell earlier were intimidated by him. If the players got into NK, Coach Jeon Sang Shik would be one of the coaches that would coach them so they were a little scared.

Only Han Woo Jin smiled and he looked at Jeon Sang Shik clear his throat.

‘Why does that kid keep smiling at me?’

Coach Jeon Sang Shik looked at Han Woo Jin with a confused expression and then turned away. He looked very charismatic as he began his speech.

“From today on, all of you in this room are now a part of NK company as tennis players. In our country, tennis isn’t a popular sport. We all have the responsibility to spread the greatness and how enjoyable tennis is across the nation.”

His speech was very concise but what he said was correct. The tennis players who are able to receive sponsorship from NK company have the responsibility to represent with their name and skills through professional tennis. If the player is unskilled or doesn't meet expectations, then they will receive a couple warnings before they are let go.

But Coach Jeon Sang Shik's speech wasn't about the business model of the company. He was the NK company's head coach, but he was also a pro player in his youth.

"There are four major tournaments in the world. Australia Open, France Open, England Wimbledon, and American Open."

How many tennis players dreamed of winning those tournaments? Among those four tournaments, world class players from all over the world come to play in them. Currently, if someone ranked 16th, no, even 32nd in one of those tournaments, they would become the best player in Korea.

The other players didn't understand why he was talking about those four major tournaments. Only Han Woo Jin and Choi Yeon Hyuk understood where he was going and they patiently waited for him to continue.

One of them knew that he could reach that level and beat it.

The other's life goal was to have the chance of entering one of those tournaments.

Finally, Coach Jeon Sang Shik's speech reached a climax as he spoke louder.

"Within ten years, I will make a player from this NK company who will attend those four major tournaments! No! Not just attend. I will make him win! Please, I hope that he must be one of you that are in this room."

The entire room was silent.

All the players' jaws dropped and they stared at him incomprehensibly as Jeon Sang Shik put down the mic and left the stage. Then the other players began speaking to themselves about how impossible that was. But two players in the crowd were fiercely determined to help make Jeon Sang Shik's dream come true.

One man in the crowd had his fist clenched.

That man was Han Woo Jin.

The passion for his dream that he had given up was now reignited.

Chapter 2

Player Contract

After Coach Jeon left, everyone went their separate ways. They had already filled out their contract forms before the exam. For those who didn't pass, their contracts had already been thrown away. But for those who passed and became NK players, their contracts were held in the office.

Tomorrow, those that passed the exam would receive their compensation from the contract. In less than ten minutes, everyone left Song Pa Gu Olympic Park's indoor tennis courts.

No, there were still two people sitting next to each other on a bench.

Han Woo Jin and Choi Yeon Hyuk.

The two of them had a gut feeling that they were receiving special treatment. Maybe in the past today, only Choi Yeon Hyuk stayed in the empty court. The fact that Han Woo Jin remained here with him today was special. At least that's what he thought.

“Woo Jin ah, did you also ‘hear’ that you have to stay here?”

“Uh, yeah.”

Choi Yeon Hyuk and Han Woo Jin laughed at each other.

The fact that they were specifically chosen by someone made them feel like they were special.

While they were giggling in the silent room, tennis coach Jeon opened the door and shouted,

“What are you guys laughing about in here?! Do you guys want me to give you a piece of hell today?!!”

“I don’t care if you start today.”

“Yeah, me too.”

Coach Jeon Sang Shik tried to intimidate them by saying that they would begin training right after the exam but those two weren't scared at all and seemed to be fine with it.

Coach Jeon Sang Shik smiled. Usually his players would curse and complain whenever he talked about practicing.

‘I actually might be able to reach it with these two guys. We might reach the four major tournaments.’

Coach Jeon's dream of being able to find a sponsor when he was player was unable to be fulfilled because of his sluggish play during tournaments, so he was unable to find any sponsors for those four tournaments.

As a player, he wasn't able to achieve his dream. But now, he is still able to achieve it through his players as a coach.

“Done. You two will sign a different contract from those other guys. Follow me and get in the car.”

“Yes sir.”

“Okay.”

Both of them quickly answered back. It was expected that they would have more demands in their contracts because they were given more benefits. This was Choi Yeon Hyuk's first time experiencing society. On the other hand, this was Han Woo Jin's first time being properly treated as a player. They were both nervous as they made their first step.

Their tennis starts now.

As soon as they exited Olympic Park, there was a Mercedes Benz E-class AMZ waiting in front of them. It was an expensive foreign car with a price of over \$130 thousand. Coach Jeon approached the car, unlocked it without hesitation, and sat in the driver's seat.

“Coach, you drive such nice car.”

Choi Yeon Hyuk was a little overwhelmed.

Coaching an unpopular sport like tennis in Korea and being able to drive an expensive foreign car?

'Coach Jeon must be very capable to be able to get a car like this.'

However, Han Woo Jin had plenty of experience riding his car and so he just opened the back door and sat in the backseat without giving off any sort of surprised expression.

He naturally pulled the seatbelt out and locked it.

Amazed at how naturally Han Woo Jin moved inside in his car, the owner, Jeon Sang Shik, and Choi Yeon Hyuk looked at him in bewilderment.

'What's with this guy? Based off his resume, his family shouldn't be that wealthy?'

'Wow is Woo Jin rich? He looks like he's familiar with this car.'

The two men who were thinking different thoughts looked at each other for a moment and settled down as the Mercedes Benz softly roared to life. Thanks to good driving skills along with a good car, the scenery slowly faded and the noise from the outside was drowned out.

The two people who were sitting in the back hadn't known each other for long, so they had nothing to talk about and slowly began to get drowsy.

Coach Jeon Sang Shik glanced at them through the rearview mirror. Their new coach gave a sigh of relief after seeing that the two guys weren't nervous about sitting next to each other as strangers in the same car for the first time. He was impressed when he saw that they were dared to go practice. But now that he saw them sleeping in his car, he felt disappointed.

"Hoo... I can't tell whether they're brave or they just have a peace of mind. Am I too old?"

When he himself was player, he was never told that he was an excellent player. But he was an excellent coach because he was able to strongly grasp a player's personality, talent, and potential at once which couldn't be matched by anyone else in Korea.

In addition, whenever he had time, he would go through foreign tennis tournament videos and he would watch all of the matches, from the amateurs to the pros.

Even though he was able to do all of that, he couldn't grasp the potential of the two in the back of his car. Obviously, the two of them had tremendous potential compared to the other players, but he couldn't pinpoint the special potential that they had.

“...It might be more fun not to know. The world doesn't work the way one wants it to. All I can do is nurture you guys the best I can possibly can.”

As a player, he couldn't reach his dream. But as a coach, he wanted to do his best to help them achieve their dreams. Jeon Sang Shik squeezed the steering wheel and imagined these two young players holding the world tournament prize.

All men with big dreams were the same. Coach Jeon smiled as he continued to daydream and he stepped harder on the gas pedal.

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NK Corporation Headquarters

One of the best logistics subsidiaries in Korea. The three people stepped in front of the building. The exterior of the building was huge. It seemed to be a combination of three or four high rise buildings which made them look like ants.

“Come here, we have an appointment for you guys.”

As soon as the door opened you could see six employees at the front desk. They bowed and greeted them politely as soon as they entered. Coach Jeon rushed inside while the two players behind him were about to greet the employees.

Han Woo Jin and Choi Yeon Hyuk bowed to them and followed the coach because they were unaccustomed to being treated like that in such a large place.

‘...I've been a pro player for ten years and I've never been here before.’

Han Woo Jin laughed bitterly at the fact that he'd never been to the headquarters even though he played for NK for ten years. Almost all the players won tournaments and had their prizes displayed at headquarters. Money, prize, a commendation, these

things were never given to Han Woo Jin.

‘It’ll be different now.’

Han Woo Jin entered the elevator and closed his eyes. He still couldn’t believe the situation he was currently in. He just wanted to sell his racket and he somehow ended up ten years in the past. Now whenever he holds a racket, strange things appear in his mind.

However, one thing was certain. Now his efforts will not be in vain.

The elevator was smooth, quick, and silent. When they arrived at the top floor, the light blinked. The three of them exited the elevator and a suited man with a solid body stood in front of them.

“Excuse me, but you cannot go beyond this point.”

Coach Jeon Sang Shik pointed with his chin.

“Are you new? I have an appointment with the president, so move.”

“Can I q-quickly check?”

“Do what you want. If we’re late, it’s not our responsibility.”

The bodyguard’s confident attitude quickly changed into a docile one as he put his hand on his earphone and listened. His face expression changed. He didn’t say anything as he quickly moved to the side.

“If I come up next time just let me go in, alright?”

“Yes. I’m sorry.”

Coach Jeon wasn’t the type to complain about these small things with the higher-ups. However, even if he didn’t complain about this, the bodyguard would surely get a warning from his boss. So Coach Jeon patted the bodyguard’s shoulder and moved on.

‘President? Is he talking about the NK president?’

Han Woo Jin couldn’t believe it. The president of NK company was one of the five

people who maintained the economy in Korea. However, there wasn't a single dirty rumor about him. He was considered to be a very noble man in today's day and age. He only heard about him in the news and newspapers. He never thought he would come face-to-face with the president.

When he turned his gaze, Choi Yeon Hyuk also looked like he was incredibly nervous. These two large men that were walking side by side looked like new military recruits.

It wouldn't be wrong to think that either.

As players going to sign a new contract with NK, it wasn't wrong to say that they were basically being recruited like the army. The only difference was that they were going to a business company instead of the military.

The three people walked through the wide long hall and stood before a gleaming, dignified-looking door. The coach knocked on the door.

"President, it's me. I called you earlier about the two players and brought them."

"Oh, hurry and come in."

You could hear a deep voice from behind the door. It was the voice of the NK president who controlled a portion of the economy of the Republic of Korea. Compared to the small shoulders of young tennis players, they had no power. These two had never met a man with such high status in their entire lives.

"Hey, hey. Relax. He's not gonna eat you or anything."

The coach saw the two extremely stiff players spoke to them and to try to get them to laugh and relax a bit. Then the door quickly opened before they were ready.

"That person... President!"

Han Woo Jin and Choi Yeon Hyuk swallowed their saliva at the sight of that man.

In the large room was an older gentleman whose hair was half-gray that was stylishly pulled back and the man looked at them. His eyes had piercing gaze and his demeanor made it seem like there was no way that he was seventy years old. When they looked at him, their chests became tight with nervousness.

“Hurhur, is there something on my face? Hurry and take a seat.”

The president laughed at them as the two quickly entered the room. Coach Jeon entered the room first and sat on the sofa. The two players, Han Woo Jin and Choi Yeon Hyuk, didn't know where to sit and looked at each other for a moment before they sat on either side of Coach Jeon Sang Shik.

The president opened his drawer and took out two envelopes. The thick envelopes were placed on the table in front of them. ‘Could they be the new player contracts?’

As Han Woo Jin thought that, the President spoke up.

“I called you guys over to give you guys a different contract than the other players.”

‘A different contract?’

Han Woo Jin and Choi Yeon Hyuk stared at the envelopes in front of them.

‘A different contract? What does he mean?’

The president smirked at their confused expressions. His face looked like that of a confident businessman that was somewhat unlikeable.

“You guys should know this. The level of tennis in our country.”

The president softly spoke.

What level is the sport at in Korea?

When the people in our country hear the word tennis, they think of ahjussis and grandpas playing with their rackets at the neighborhood parks near their apartments. Those who knew a little bit more about tennis would only think about Roger Federer or Maria Sharapova.

We don't even remember the tennis players from our own country. No, we don't know them. Of course, someone might know a pro player, but only a very few would know.

“In our country, tennis has become a sport for the elderly. There are no famous players. There aren't any world-class players. That's why tennis is in this state.”

The president's eyes were burning like a wildfire unlike his voice that had a trace of self-restraint. He was angry. Han Woo Jin followed the president's gaze and swallowed his saliva again. Gulp! You could hear someone next to him swallow as well. Choi Yeon Hyuk also couldn't handle the ferociousness that the president was displaying.

Whether he knew what the two players were feeling or not, the president circled the room twice.

"In Korea, sports such as soccer and baseball have grown to the point where players join the world league. People are enthusiastic about news of Park Ji Sung's goals and Choo Sin Soo's home runs. But what about tennis?!?"

The president's voice rose wildly and echoed throughout the room. Even though it wasn't their fault, Han Woo Jin's body shrank and he did his best to not lower his head. If he slightly dropped his head, it would be the same as completely dropping his head. Han Woo Jin listened to him speak with a burning gaze in his eyes.

"Our country's players can't even get into the top 30 in the world rankings. There isn't any hope for them to win any of the major tournaments. Badminton is more popular than tennis and they're basically the same, hitting the ball with a racket, but why is tennis so bad?!"

The president was basically yelling at this point but what he was saying was the truth.

The reality of Korean tennis was terrible. Lee Hyung Taek who was the hope for Korean tennis only lasted for a short while. After his career began, it only went downhill. Recently, a few young players were doing well but they didn't amount to much on the world stage.

Compared to badminton where Korea did well in both the Olympics and world tournaments, Korean tennis was at a low skill level compared to other countries. Koreans were basically digging the earth because they were so low.

He took a deep breath and spoke to the coach.

"Coach Jeon, bring it out."

"Yes, President."

The coach did as the president had ordered and ripped open the envelopes. In the

envelopes were stacks of over 20 pages of paperwork. Coach Jeon carefully put them on the table to not drop them.

The two players didn't know if they could look at them or not so they just stared at the president and the coach.

"You guys can read them, but it'll be better to listen to the explanation first."

The two retracted their outstretched hands and shifted back to their polite postures. The president's face softened after he saw them pull back their hands. His expression was as if he were looking at his grandchildren.

"Hoo... you guys don't have to be so nervous. Since I've been stressed recently my voice might seem a bit rough... so, shall we get started?"

"Yes."

"Yes."

'How can we not be nervous even though he told us not to be nervous?' The two answered with rigid short answers. The president also knew what they were thinking. The president opened his mouth and softly laughed before he began speaking.

"There is only one main subject of the contract that I am going to present to you. Give and take."

"Give and take?"

Han Woo Jin and Choi Yeon Hyuk didn't understand what he was saying. When players joined a company with a contract, they would normally get a salary and support from the staff. What did it have to do with give and take?

"First, you guys should take a look at the first three pages. It'll be better for you to read that first and then we'll talk."

There was the sound of rustling papers in both their hands. Han Woo Jin read with the determination of not missing a single word.

Affiliation: NK Special Player Team

Duration of contract: 5 years

Down payment: None

Salary: None

Travel allowance: Full coverage

Winning allowance: 100% of prize money

Runner-up allowance: 50% of prize money

- Starting from the effective date of the contract, NK company will provide the players a place of residence, daily necessities, training materials, travel expenses, and a personal trainer, free of charge.
- NK Company will do its best to secure spots in tournaments.
- The player will not receive a monthly salary or down payment but will receive full support and coverage for transportation expenses, lodging, and meals during tournaments.
- If the player wins a tournament or a league of ATP 250 or higher, they are eligible to renegotiate their contract for more benefits.

‘This is unconventional.’

This was the first thing that popped up in his mind. According to this contract, he could partake in as many competitions as he wanted to in a year. This was a huge benefit, considering that one of the main reasons why Korean tennis players didn’t play internationally was because of the lack of funding,

No salary or down payment? That was no problem at all. On the contrary, the salary he would have received couldn’t compare the amount that they would spend on his tournament fees. Currently, the top-ranked tennis pros in Korea received \$50,000 annually and \$350,000 as extra financial support. In other words, the amount of money spent supporting players would be more than his annual salary.

Furthermore, with this contract, there wasn’t a limit for the amount of support they could receive. In other words, they could receive unlimited support.

“P-president. Are you serious?”

Unlike Choi Yeon Hyuk who didn't understand the implications of this contract, Han Woo Jin who had been a tennis player for ten years felt like this was an opportunity of a lifetime. Maybe in the past, only Choi Yeon Hyuk sat here and signed this contract. And in less than five years he would be the runner-up for Wimbledon which was one of the four major tournaments in the world.

The president nodded at Han Woo Jin who was still in doubt. He sincerely decided to nurture these two players into world-class pros.

“Why did you choose new players like us? And according to these terms, NK will spend enormous amounts of money on us.”

He could just ignore the fact that they were spending so much money on that. But throughout his life, Han Woo Jin realized that if you ignored uncertain things, they would come back to bite you later. In his point of view, the president looked like he appreciated his question.

“You're right. If you guys don't win any tournaments we will lose a lot of money. It is also a huge risk for us because there is no penalty for you. So, if you guys give up during the duration of the contract, we will experience a huge loss. You're wondering why I'm still offering this contract right now even though it's such a huge risk for me?”

“Yes.”

Han Woo Jin nodded his head. Choi Yeon Hyuk still had no idea what was going on but through Han Woo Jin's questions and the president's words, he somewhat understood that this contract was a huge benefit for the players. The president met the serious gazes of the two players and turned around.

He cleared his throat and looked up at the ceiling.

“Because I like tennis.”

“What?”

Han Woo Jin opened his mouth because of the unexpected answer.

‘Because you like tennis? That's why you're going to make a contract that could cost

you several million?' The president laughed when he saw Han Woo Jin's doubtful and curious eyes.

The president closed his eyes and continued speaking.

"Hoo... Several million isn't that much for me. I just want to see athletes from my country standing on world championship courts. For me, several million is nothing."

His concept of money was completely different.

A player like Han Woo Jin couldn't even imagine the scale of hundreds of thousands of dollars, but the president casually spoke of millions. If you need money, just call the president of NK company and he'll give you several million, just like that.

"Actually, I can give you million-dollar salaries and promise many incentives. That's not difficult. But do you know why I decided to not give you a down payment and a salary?"

Choi Yeon Hyuk was absent-minded but Han Woo Jin somewhat had an idea. He was a domestic player for over ten years and he saw the weaknesses of domestic players. The president was surprised that Han Woo Jin seemed to know what he was talking about.

'Hoho, can this young man already see that far? How surprising.'

Currently, Korean tennis was stagnant. The reason for the stagnation was the indifference for the sport and lack of support. But above all, the most important reason was desperation.

It wasn't enough whether Korean players wanted to win or if they knew that they could win. They needed to have the mentality of absolutely winning. Also, the introduction of a monthly salary for professional players who weren't able to obtain sponsors due to the lack of publicity and popularity of tennis was growing larger and larger at the same time.

Tennis was a costly sport. However, in order to make good money, one had to at least reach the top 100 in the world rankings. Tennis players from all over the world would try their best to raise their skills in order to succeed as athletes and compete in tournaments in order to crazily increase their ranks. As their skills got better, their career experiences would gradually accumulate.

However, when Korean, Japanese, and other Asian athletes were guaranteed a stable income, they would choose to settle down. Why should they spend such large amounts of money in overseas tournaments with an uncertain chance of winning? Tennis players that live without the worry of money because of their salary lose their purpose and slowly start to decay and become rotten.

Sick and tired of these absurd situations, the NK president immediately made the decision to find young, outstanding players.

Now, there were two young men before him. Two young tigers that could fulfill his wish.

“Pros need ambition. I need a talented person who wants to win more than anyone else. We need that person to constantly push themselves past their limits.”

That’s when the president thought to himself, ‘What if I don’t give them a monthly salary or a down payment but pay for their full support as players?’

That’s how the outrageous offer to fully provide food, clothing, training, coaches, and travel expenses appeared. Only cash was not given to them. Based on the contract, in order to earn money, players would have to earn it with their own efforts.

“It won’t be easy. Although I’ll do everything I can, it won’t be easy. There’s a possibility that you guys might constantly lose and not win anything and leave without anything.”

This wasn’t said to intimidate or threaten them. Han Woo Jin knew the ruthlessness of the sports world more than anyone else and reached his out without hesitation.

Sususuk

At the bottom of page three was Han Woo Jin’s signature. The president looked into his eyes as he confidently signed the contract. Then Choi Yeon Hyuk also reached out with his hand and signed it with his stylish signature.

It was at that moment the two players were now carrying the dreams of the president and Coach Jeon.

Han Woo Jin actually couldn’t remember anything they talked about after he signed the contract. He just listened to the NK president speak and signed the contract that was laden with amazingly good conditions. Han Woo Jin’s head was full of those

events.

Just all of that made it feel like his head was about to burst. He couldn't remember his responses to the president when he asked him questions.

Coach Jeon noticed the players' conditions and decided to send them off first.

"You two head down to the parking lot first. I have to speak with the president for a bit longer."

"Yeah..."

"Yes..."

The two men stood up like zombies without souls, bowed to them, and carefully left. The president looked at them leave through the door with a cheerful face.

"Are you satisfied?"

"Well, they're good. Very good."

The president nodded his head a few times at Coach Jeon's question.

"President, how do you view those two?"

"Hm..."

The president's eyes narrowed as he thought. He was the president of such a large scale corporation like NK, and he was able to see in a different perspective compared to Coach Jeon. It was because of this special view of his that he was able to make good friends in the harsh business world.

What did the president think of those two? Coach Jeon Sang Shik wasn't as experienced as the president and couldn't pinpoint the personalities of those two players; thus, he was curious about what the president would say.

"Choi Yeon Hyuk. The young man is undoubtedly a genius. He was born with tall, long and strong limbs, so his physical attributes are excellent. He has amazing technique and skill that already surpasses the domestic professional level but is still lacking compared to western athletes. You should raise him properly, and you should have fun

getting him within the top 100 in the world."

His gaze was that of a tennis fan, not that of the president of NK company. Up until this point, what he said was correct and that was expected.

"What about Han Woo Jin?"

"Han Woo Jin... Yeah, that was his name."

The president's smile faded and changed into something else as if he was looking at something interesting.

"That child is interesting. He's not very talented. His skill is at a level that anyone can reach but he was able to reach it very quickly. Don't you think so? Until I saw his serve that is."

"...I think so too. I also understand that he's hardworking."

But what was his serve like at the end? It had incredible speed and a ridiculous spin. Also, the spin could drastically change the degree in which it bounced back up. Coach Jeon couldn't believe that a person with no talent was able to pull off that serve with pure effort.

"How fun. He was born talentless, yet he tries to live stronger than anybody else. Usually, when someone tries to live like that they break, but he has something special in him."

"Han Woo Jin. Han Wooo~~ Jin~~"

The president said his name and sang it once. Then he tightly grabbed his armrest with a grip that didn't look right for someone of his age. The excitement that he displayed that made his blood boil certainly didn't match the temperament of someone his age.

"You did great Coach Jeon. Even I think they're great."

That was how their discussion ended.

Coach Jeon Sang Shik drove them to a nearby subway station. He tried to drive them all the way to their homes but both Han Woo Jin and Choi Yeon Hyuk refused to let him do so.

Han Woo Jin parted ways with Choi Yeon Hyuk and absentmindedly walked to his one-room studio that he previously lived in. He realized that he didn't have the key to his one-room studio in his pocket and came to his senses.

'Ah, was I still living with my parents during this time?'

In his previous life, he was able to move out of his parents house three years after the examination. At that time, he was overjoyed that he was a pro tennis player and he was optimistic about his career. However, thinking about it now seemed like it was a sad and naive memory.

His one-room studio wasn't too far from his parents' home. It was ten minutes away by bus and about a thirty-minute walk.

He looked up at the sky. The sky was already dark and the streetlights lit up the sky. Han Woo Jin just decided to walk home.

After he joined the company, he visited his parents only once a month. Three years into his career, he stopped visiting them because he felt bad. His career wasn't advancing and he could do nothing for them. Sometimes they sent him money and he was depressed.

'It's different now.'

Han Woo Jin stopped in front of the door. The apartment complex was named Sung Woon Apartments which was located on Gang Book Gu Street. How many times had his family moved to raise him as a tennis player?

'This time, I'll make you happy.'

'Young body, an unknown power, and a special contract. I will show them that I will be different from the past me who put in endless amounts of effort with no talent and achieved nothing.'

Han Woo Jin stepped inside the building.

He entered the elevator and went up to the eighth floor. Han Woo Jin arrived at the front door, but he was reminded of the one thing that he had forgotten.

‘What was the password again?’

It had been seven years since he moved out from his parents’ home. His memory wasn’t that great. He did his best to combine the numbers but he failed so he finally decided to ring the doorbell.

Ding-dong

It was that basic bell sound. He remembered asking his parents to change the sound to something that wasn’t so generic. As he stood there, his chest tightened and the door suddenly opened.

“Why didn’t you put in the password? Why did you ring the bell?”

“Ah, I was thinking about something...”

He was speaking nonsense. He was about to make up an excuse when he saw his mother.

Her face was still young. Her face was one that showed that she always stayed up all night worrying about her children. A face that looked like it was from the past but was actually in the present. Han Woo Jin’s eyes began tearing up.

“What’s wrong?!”

After he calmed down, Han Woo Jin abruptly hugged his mother. He felt so emotional because all he did in his past life was give them hardships. However, he couldn’t tell them anything about it because they wouldn’t understand.

So he decided to just tell them the good news.

“Mom, I passed the NK exam and I’m now a pro.”

“What? Are you serious?”

His father heard the commotion and came out to see what was happening. He pushed aside his mother, went up to Han Woo Jin, and told him to say it again.

“I became a pro at NK company.”

“Are you serious?”

At least this moment was the same. He was reminded of the past when he told them the joyous news. They all cheered and had a group hug. It was a *deja vu* that wasn't actually *deja vu* so he couldn't help but face this ironic situation.

Hearing his answer, his parents hugged and laughed.

“Aigoo, my son truly became a pro player!”

“I told you. I noticed his talent since he was young!”

“Talent? What are you talking about? He was really dumb because he got it from you.”

His parents made some light jokes and teased each other. Then a girl walked towards them with sleepy eyes.

“What's wrong...? Why are you guys so loud?...”

Han Yoo Ra was Han Woo Jin's younger sister who had no interest in tennis at all.

When she was a toddler, the family took her to the tennis court and gave her a ball. She bit the ball and cried because her tooth came out. Whether it was a traumatic experience or not, their parents never took her back again. So whenever her parents watched tennis on TV she always went into her room.

Han Yoo Ra was like the opposite Han Woo Jin. When he was an unsuccessful player, she graduated from a good university and got into a good company.

His face froze when he saw her.

“Oppa, is something wrong? What's wrong with your face?”

“Ah, Yoo Ra is still in high school.”

Due to the fact that she was sick of the parents who were crazy about tennis and the brother that wasted his life because of tennis, she moved out as soon as she graduated from university. He couldn't say anything in front of her parents. His parents said that it was their fault because they didn't pay enough attention to her, but he felt sorry because he knew that it was all his fault and his tennis.

She was wearing pink checkered pajamas. Her eyes were half-closed. She had a pretty face but her hair was a mess. Seeing her messy face, he couldn't help but laugh.

“I was shocked at your appearance. You should take a look in the mirror. It's not a joke.”

“Of course, I just woke up...”

Han Yoo Ra treated it as if it was nothing and turned away to go back to sleep. However, she came in at the wrong time.

Her mother's hand stopped her as she tried to go inside her room. Her movement was like an eagle snapping up a rabbit's neck.

“Uh? What are you doing?”

“What are you talking about? Your brother became a pro today. So put on some clothes. Let's go eat some sushi to celebrate.”

“It's so late, what are you talking about?”

Their parents ignored their daughter's cry and began putting on clothes. Knowing that they would act like this, Han Woo Jin didn't take off his shoes. He stood in the doorway and looked at Han Yoo Ra's eyes.

‘It's easier if you give up.’

Han Yoo Ra understood his message and slumped her shoulders. Her body language showed that she had given up.

The family quickly got ready to go out in ten minutes. They left the apartment and faced the cold night air.

‘What did we eat last time?’

He couldn't remember because his memory was still fuzzy.

'I don't think it was sushi last time. Well, it doesn't matter. As long as it tastes good.'

Han Woo Jin lightly thought about it and moved on. He suddenly turned his head.

His mother kept on chattering next to him and his father was bragging to his friends on the phone. His sister was reluctantly following along while complaining. He unconsciously smiled at this scene.

'This was the last time.'

'I ranked the lowest among our companies players, and I continuously had bad rankings.'

Han Woo Jin's best rank was fourth place at a Korean tournament.

They all sat around the table and ordered one big plate of sushi. He was eating the grilled fish appetizer with chopsticks and said, "Next time, let's go eat some grilled eel. I know Dad likes it."

His father always said that grilled eel was the best side dish with alcohol. Han Woo Jin talked about what to eat next time before the sushi had even come out. His family members stared at him with wide eyes but he just smiled. He put his hand underneath the table and gripped an imaginary racket that wasn't there. You could see his veins and muscles popping up from his forearm.

'I will pay for the next meal.'

That's what he decided.

Chapter 3

Practice

Since he lacked talent, Han Woo Jin woke up very early in order to practice. He normally woke up at 5:30 and went running at 6:00, but today was a little different. He took out his spare racket. As soon as he picked up the handle, his stats popped up.

[Han Woo Jin]

Strength 48 / Stamina 45 / Agility 40

HP 1800/1800 SP 330/330

Forehand: 9/20

Backhand: 4/20

Serve: 10/20

Volley: 3/20

Smash: 7/20

Special skill: Sparrow (Serve)

“...It’s still the same.”

His stats were the same ever since he passed the exam yesterday, which was expected because he didn’t practice at all after the exam. Han Woo Jin thought as he played around with the racket.

‘How should I properly use this

?’

He still couldn’t utilize the full potential of his power. Anyway, today was a rest day

because it was the day after the exam. He unexpectedly got a free day, so he wanted to use today to understand his ability.

He wrote down a list of what he knew so far.

1. If I hold someone's racket, I can see their stats, including my own.
2. Whenever I play a game, I can level up and use skills.
3. If I level up a skill, the skill in real life increases.
4. If my skill level reaches 10, I can obtain a special skill.
5. If I get a special achievement, I will be rewarded.

He took out a notepad, wrote everything down, and reviewed it to make sure he didn't leave anything out. He couldn't think of anything else. This was what he knew so far.

"Can I level up by practicing?"

'If I can only gain points and experience through games, practice would be useless. It would only increase my physical capabilities.' Han Woo Jin's skill had already reached the limit of his talent. It was a skill cap that anybody could reach with enough time and effort. There was no point in being able to reach a level that everyone could get to.

No, his ten years of experience would still be useful. It was the same as passing on a 33-year-old's experience to a new 23-year-old player.

He needed time to do some fine tuning on himself.

"Anyway, I should go do some practice after lunch."

There was a tennis court in the park in front of his apartment. It couldn't actually be called a tennis court since the ground of the court was sand and there were old balls all around the court. But even with the bad conditions, Han Woo Jin was thankful that there was still a place for him to practice. Anyway, he wouldn't be able to come back after he started his training tomorrow.

As soon as he put down his racket, someone knocked on his door.

“Hey, Woo Jin, are you okay? Why didn’t you go practice this morning?”

“Ah, because I got drunk yesterday, I wanted to rest. I didn’t want to accidentally get hurt while running.”

Han Woo Jin replied to his mother who suddenly knocked on the door. He wasn’t wrong. If he accidentally got hurt while running, it would have affected his training that would start tomorrow.

“Oh is that so? Then we can have breakfast together. We haven’t done so in a long time.”

He always ran in the morning so he always had breakfast after his family. He couldn’t remember the last time he had breakfast with his family. He always used to eat meals by himself.

“Make something delicious, Mom.”

“Okay, expect something good.”

His mother was really happy because he gave her a favorable answer.

He put the racket down and turned on his laptop.

He had returned ten years into the past. He decided to look up recent news because he wanted to become familiar with the current state of the world. His room was quiet except for the clicks that came from the mouse.

•••

Midday, at the tennis court.

Han Woo Jin bounced the tennis ball up and down with his racket. Front, back, and diagonal. He twisted his grip while bouncing the ball and handled it adeptly. He was able to do this easily since he had a good foundation.

He smashed the ball hard toward the ground and immediately caught the ball. Then he took a deep breath.

“Okay, let’s give it a try.”

He threw up the ball into the air and used an overhead stroke. This was a basic move. The ball traveled from the left side of the court to the right side.

Pabang!

The ball nearly hit the service line and bounced back up. The ground was sturdy, but because it was sand the ball didn't bounce correctly. He served several times, then he decided something in his mind before throwing up the ball.

His body once again moved in the motion of a serve. His right foot moved behind him with his waist turned and his muscles were strained. The hand that was holding the racket was putting so much strength into gripping the racket that it was trembling. This serve required an insane amount of spin and speed, Sparrow.

Papang!

The 200 km/h serve was impressive to see. There was a small hole where the ball landed in the sand, but Han Woo Jin still wasn't satisfied.

'...I know the principle behind it, but is it bad to just follow along?'

He now knew what to do. However, he didn't know how to use Sparrow without the using the system due to his lack of talent. He might be able to do it if his skill level rises.

'As the serve level rises, the serves improve. That's for sure.'

Speed and precision improved. After hitting a few serves, he was able to tell the difference. Han Woo Jin's main skill in his previous life was being able to consistently and quickly to the service line. He was only good at serving.

"Ah, this again."

He massaged his aching wrist and complained to himself. He was thinking of how to deal with his self-blaming attitude which became a bad habit of his. Then he heard a voice call to him.

"Hey Woo Jin! You're working so early!"

"Ah, Mr. Hwang."

His name was Hwang In Soo. He was one of the tenants in the same apartment and one of the neighborhood ahjussis that occasionally played tennis. His skills weren't that bad compared to the average person so he sometimes played with him. He was reminded of old memories when he saw his face. If he didn't see him, he would have never remembered him again.

Han Woo Jin grabbed Hwang In Soo's racket. He opened his mouth and said, "Ah".

[Hwang In Soo]

Strength 41 / Stamina 33 / Agility 32

HP 1290/1320 SP 210/210

Forehand: 5/20

Backhand: 5/20

Serve: 6/20

Smash: 5/20

Special Skill: None

'Oh, he's better than I thought.'

He turned 45 this year and he was better than Lee Jin Seob whom he played against in the exam. Compared to Lee Jin Seob who played by only focusing on his strength, Hwang In Soo was an all-rounded player. However, he didn't have drop shots or lobs in his skill set which are heavily reliant on his reflexes.

While Han Woo Jin was looking at Hwang In Soo's status window, he noticed that his own status had changed a little.

SP 315/330

'My SP decreased...? Is it because I used Sparrow?"

As he observed his status, his SP didn't decrease through just normal moves/skills. When he hit serves a couple times his HP went down but his SP never did. Han Woo

Jin made the assumption that special skills used SP.

A large, wrinkled, and tough hand tapped Han Woo Jin's shoulder.

"What's wrong? Are you tired today? I was going to play with you today."

"Ah, sorry, I was thinking about something. You should warm up."

"Oh, so you can play? Alright, I'll start warming up."

Although he didn't have the talent, he was still a pro. There was no one in this neighborhood who played tennis better than himself. Hwang In Soo was excited that he could play a game with someone that was on a high level like Han Woo Jin so he began warming up.

Han Woo Jin massaged his wrist until it no longer ached. Suddenly, he heard a voice pop up.

[You have finished your practice. I will calculate your practice experience.]

[...You practiced the serve 8 times. Your serve skill experience has increased a little.]

'Good.'

Han Woo Jin clenched his fist as he pumped himself up.

"Are you ready?"

"You can start whenever you want."

Hwang In Soo answered very energetically, and Han Woo Jin hit the ball softly. It wasn't a serious game so he didn't go all out. His serve level was 10, so Hwang In Soo wasn't at a high enough level to return it.

"Akkoo!"

Pang!

'He's not bad.' Han Woo Jin thought as he easily rallied back and forth. He swung his racket comfortably but he was consistently hitting the ball near the service line. If Mr.

Hwang was just a little bit late he would have lost points and he was playing well. After hitting the ball back and forth ten times, Mr. Hwang finally made a mistake.

Toong!

“Uh?”

The ball slowly flew up and it bounced in front of Han Woo Jin’s foot. If he couldn’t return this, he’d be a fool. The ball bounced slightly above his waist and he swiftly swung his racket. The ball quickly went back to the other side of the court.

Pang!

“Now it is 15:0.”

“Wow, I couldn’t even see it. It wasn’t a joke when I heard you became a pro. You’re so good.”

Mr. Hwang smiled and laughed as he complimented him. According to Hwang In Soo’s perception, it was impossible for him to hit the ball.

Han Woo Jin realized his body was getting better whenever he used his racket, so Han Woo Jin began to try harder. He began experimenting with volleys that he’d never done before and also tried some drop shots, thus losing some points.

“Woo Jin, are you practicing drop shots these days?”

“Yes, but it’s really hard to control my strength.”

Han Woo Jin just put on a bitter smile. He didn’t have to be able to use every skill in tennis. However, drop shots were necessary for him to learn because learning that would allow him to easily develop other skills.

The score was 40:15. If he wasn’t experimenting, he would have had a perfect game. But his personality wasn’t so bad as to go all out against a neighborhood ahjussi.

It was Hwang In Soo’s turn to serve. He tossed the green ball high up into the air.

“This time I will use Rising.”

When the ball bounced up to the height of his eyebrows, Han Woo Jin twisted his body in an exaggerated manner.

Pabang!

The racket crushed the ball with so much force and speed that Mr. Hwang wasn't even able to react to it. Mr. Hwang, who couldn't even hit it, just laughed.

“I'm no match for you, haha!”

“No, it's because you're good that I'm able to rally with you.”

Han Woo Jin spoke modestly, and at that moment, he heard a pop up sound.

[In return for winning the game, you gained experience in your smash, volley, and drop shot skills.]

[You failed in using the drop shot. Therefore, you have not gained the drop shot skill.]

[You have gained experience points for successfully using the smash skill.]

[For using a volley for the first time, your volley level has risen by one.]

‘It works like this?’

It seemed like skills were only recorded if they were successfully performed. Moreover, since Han Woo Jin already had the volley and smash skills because he used them in a game, they gained experience.

[Han Woo Jin]

Strength 48 / Stamina 45 / Agility 40

HP 1760/1800 SP 325/340

Forehand: 9/20

Backhand: 4/20

Serve: 10/20

Volley: 4/20

Smash: 7/20

Special skills: Sparrow (Serve)

He felt that he gained a level in volley because its skill level was too low. Han Woo Jin learned another fact about the system.

'If a skill level goes up, then SP goes up by 10.

The SP total amount is the same as the skill level total amount multiplied by ten. So if I raise my skill level, I can increase the number of times I can use Sparrow.'

Han Woo Jin also thought that he had to learn how to do drop shots and lobs. He picked up the ball on the ground.

"Can I serve this game?"

"Sure, do whatever you want. This Mr. Hwang isn't dead yet!"

Mr. Hwang shouted energetically across the court and suddenly a green streak of light appeared.

Pabang!

"Uh...!"

He felt sorry for Mr. Hwang but he needed to use the full extent of his serve skill in order to level it up. Hwang In Soo who had no idea about what just happened smiled blankly.

"15:0."

"Huh..."

Mr. Hwang's face died as he saw the tennis ball still spinning on the net. Han Woo Jin threw up the ball again. Once again, there was a streak of green light.

Pang!

This game took longer than he thought it would.

Because this wasn't a professional game, Han Woo Jin experimented by trying out new skills. So he lost several points.

In the two sets that they played, he had lost four games so far 6-1, and right now it was 5-3, 40:30. He lost three games in the current set because he was practicing lobs and drop shots. It was match point and the final rally began.

Han Woo Jin was thinking about what serve to use and threw up the ball.

'I should end it with Sparrow.'

He wanted to show Mr. Hwang the Sparrow. They had a friendly relationship so he wanted to show him something. It was also because this would be his last time playing here.

Pang!

Han Woo Jin's serve was so incredibly powerful that he was scared and the ball dug into the ground, causing the dust to fly everywhere. Because the ball traveled too fast over the net, the net itself was twisted and tangled up multiple times.

Mr. Hwang had a blank look on his face while he stares at him because he couldn't even see the ball due to the speed of the serve.

The game was over. Han Woo Jin spoke as he put his arm over the net.

"You worked hard."

"Oh, okay. But what was that you just did? It looks like something only pros can do."

Han Woo Jin just smiled in front of Hwang In Soo who said the word 'pro'.

"I became a pro yesterday. I'm a player for NK company."

"Really? Are you serious? Wow, so I played with a pro? I'm so lucky. Do I need to pay a game fee or something?"

Mr. Hwang playfully asked this while shaking his hand and Han Woo Jin shrugged it

off. He teased him back.

“Aiee, what are you talking about? You can just buy me a drink or something like that.”

“Ah, is that the price for the game?”

They chatted for while before separating and Han Woo Jin drank the drink that he bought for him. Looking at the setting sun, he grabbed his racket.

[Han Woo Jin]

Strength 48 / Stamina 45 / Agility 40

HP 1540/1800 SP 330/360

Forehand: 9/20

Backhand: 4/20

Serve: 10/20

Volley: 4/20

Smash: 7/20

Drop shot: 1/20

Lob: 1/20

Special Skill: Sparrow (Serve)

Han Woo Jin's status now showed the lob and drop shot skills and because of that he gained 20 SP. This was the result of his hard work and effort which he was unable to achieve in his past life due to his lack of talent. Now he can get skills and level them up through achievements and effort.

‘Let's just go at this pace.’

Slow and steady.

Even if he didn't advance quickly it would fine with him as long as he was progressing and getting better bit by bit. Doing 100 baby steps was better than not improving at all.

If Choi Yeon Hyuk's talent was like having wings and being able to fly, Han Woo Jin didn't even have legs to walk on in his previous life. But now he had legs. Two special legs that were different from everyone else's.

•••

"So you're going to start living in the player's dormitory starting tomorrow?"

"Yes. Maybe."

His father suddenly asked Han Woo Jin and he answered with a terse answer. Han Woo Jin told him about his special contract. His father, who had more knowledge about tennis than the average person, nodded with satisfaction.

Only his mother was worried about her son living far away and her eyes were red from being sad.

"Aigoo, you only recently came back from the army and now you're leaving already. Can't you commute?"

"Dear, once a man makes a decision he can't change his mind. Woo Jin is now an adult. He needs to find his own path in life."

"But..."

"He's not even going that far. He's just going to be around Sung Pa Goo, why are you worried about that? It's good that whenever he has a game, we can go to him, right?"

'My father normally doesn't speak a lot but once he gets going he doesn't stop. That's why he always wins whenever my parents fight or argue.' Han Woo Jin laughed at his parents' bickering and couldn't help but remember the last he saw this. Han Yoo Ra, who was watching TV, looked at her brother.

"Yoo Ra, what?"

His sister shrugged as if nothing was wrong and said, "Nothing. I just think you

changed a bit."

"...what changed?"

'Did she notice something?' Han Woo Jin thought that it would never happen but he couldn't help his nervousness. He knew his sister was very smart.

"You looked really anxious before the entrance exam, but now you look very confident."

"Do you think so?"

"Yeah, you look a lot better. Watching you live so exhaustingly was tiring."

Han Yoo Ra mumbled to herself so her parents wouldn't hear and went to her room.

She had been observing him play tennis longer than he thought. Ever since he was a junior he never won anything, and yet he did nothing but practice. He didn't sleep well and just watched pro games and studied. Even with a nosebleed, he just plugged nose with tissues and kept on swinging his racket. That's why Han Yoo Ra was always worried about his racket.

Even when she begged her older brother to rest while crying, he refused.

Because he constantly neglected her, she stopped talking to him.

Finally, Han Woo Jin realized that the thing that made the relationship between him and his sister wider.

'It wasn't just tennis. It was messed up from the beginning.'

He smiled bitterly.

Chapter 4

Test League

Seoul, NK company tennis club.

Coach Jeon, who was wearing sunglasses and tight-looking pants, stood up in front of Han Woo Jin who only had brought a carrier with his clothes and simple daily necessities.

“Are you ready?”

“Yes.”

Han Woo Jin nodded without hesitation. His life was wholly dedicated to tennis. He would never give up on tennis unless tennis gave up on him. He even dreamed of swinging his racket. He served and returned tennis balls countless number of times.

Han Woo Jin’s eyes didn’t waver as he looked at Coach Jeon as he patted his shoulder. Old people couldn’t help but admire young people’s vigor and fighting spirits.

“Okay, let’s first unpack your things. This map will tell you where everything is so don’t lose it.”

“Yes.”

“Lunch is at noon. Come to the outdoor court at 2 PM. We will have a test league.”

Test league.

Han Woo Jin’s eyes had a look of reminiscence in them. This test determined the unofficial rankings of the players in the company. It was a like a game between 32 players where first and second place received small monetary prizes.

In the past, Han Woo Jin was always last place. Unfortunately for him, he went against a really strong opponent during his first test league and had his first biggest loss at 6-1 and 6-0.

After that, his career went downhill.

Soon after, everybody treated him as if he was invisible. Some people even told him to pick up the balls. Some people threatened him and told him to purposely lose games and give up. He really tried to pay them back with his own abilities but his talent was not enough and he never got better.

Those people all left the company after they placed first or second in the test league. But Han Woo Jin stayed.

Coach Jeon left right away after he checked his room number. He looked at Coach Jeon's back and thought to himself.

'In sports, only the most talented has the right to speak. Those guys didn't do anything. It was my fault for being so weak.'

He didn't need the map that Coach Jeon gave him. He just glanced at his room number and put it in his bag. How many people knew this facility better than him? Even Coach Jeon didn't know as much as he did.

Confidently walking through the halls, Han Woo Jin thought to himself again.

He could never forget the humiliation he went through during those ten years even though he had come back. He was upset at himself for being so weak. The bitterness that he harbored thinking that he could get better through effort...

'Okay, in this world, the weak are wrong and the strong are right.'

Room 301. Having arrived at his room, he opened the door with his card key. He could see that the inside of the dorm was very clean and organized. He took out his clothes and put them all in his closet, and then something caught his eye.

A tennis racket.

ProConnect company's new racket was on his desk. It was for all-rounded players and it was called the 'Even Balance' racket.

Han Woo Jin stretched his hands and grabbed the grip.

Han Woo Jin looked at his status window.

‘This time, I will be the one in the right.’

•••

2 PM. Thirty-two players gathered at NK company’s outside tennis courts. According to Coach Jeon, all of the players that represented NK company were here. The old and new players of the company mingled together. Only Han Woo Jin was by himself, talking to no one with his eyes closed among the crowd of players.

‘Either way, there is no one good enough for me to take notice of.’

He just grabbed his racket and saw all the players’ status windows. Except for Choi Yeon Hyuk, the rest of the players’ stats were messed up.

However, there were only a few who had decent stats and were stronger than him. However, several had [Hungover] statuses in their status windows, which he thought was ridiculous.

How could they take tennis so lightly?

Pros getting drunk the night before an important test?

‘No way.’

Han Woo Jin finally realized the anger that the NK president had. Lazy players and no motivation. It was because of these people’s attitudes that this country’s tennis was doomed. He sighed as he looked at those players.

Someone must have seen Han Woo Jin sigh and that person strongly gripped his shoulder.

“Hey!”

“...what.”

Han Woo Jin rudely responded to the person because of his rude way of grabbing him. Han Woo Jin looked back indifferently. The person who grabbed his shoulder was a large bald man who was glaring at him. He was trying to intimidate him and he a dragon tattoo on his forearm.

“What? What did you say, punk? How dare a newbie like you sigh?!”

Korea had this kind of useless culture, especially in sports. The people who didn't have experience, talent, or good personalities tried to control the rookies with their seniority. Furthermore, in sports, discrimination was a lot worse for those who didn't attend the same college. [1]

Han Woo Jin thought that he didn't need to respond to him and turned away. If he used violence anyway, he could get kicked out. This outside tennis court had eight cameras. They recorded the players' practices and they also had to make sure that there was evidence for any sort of violence.

“Hey! You're not looking at me? Hey! You bitch!”

Han Woo Jin just ignored the bald man who cursed at him. The bald man's face turned red and he kept on using profanities. But Han Woo Jin's face never changed his indifferent expression as if he couldn't hear it. Anyway, this kind of childish matter was nothing.

A quick moment later, they could hear Coach Jeon making his arrival and the outside court suddenly became quiet. The bald man hit Han Woo Jin's back and went to his seat. Coach Jeon had absolute coaching power against the players so everyone was afraid of him.

Coach Jeon arrived in front of the players. He tilted his head and asked, “It was a bit loud while I was walking over. What happened?”

“...”

No one answered. Han Woo Jin knew this would happen. Who would stand up for a newbie on their first day against the baldie who had been in the company before him? Han Woo Jin wasn't offended by this. He was already no longer impacted by these trivial things.

However, it was a bit different this time.

“Coach Jeon.”

“Yes, Choi Yeon Hyuk. Speak.”

Choi Yeon Hyuk raised his hand and was given the permission to speak. He put down his hand as he spoke and pointed to the bald man who had been cursing.

“That guy began yelling and cursing at Woo Jin for no reason. I think he needs to get punished by the player’s policy.”

Both the bald man that had been called out and Han Woo Jin did not expect any help; they were very surprised. The first one who came to his senses was the bald man. Although he was surprised, he yelled at Choi Yeon Hyuk.

“What are you talking about? You punks!...”

“Hey, Im Sang Hoon!”

“...C-coach.”

“Shut your mouth. If what Yeon Hyuk said is true, you better be prepared to die today.”

“C-coach, it’s not true! The new guys are lying to you!”

Im Sang Hoon’s face was very pitiful and it looked as if he was wronged. Even Han Woo Jin who was the one that had been attacked in front of everyone thought that the bald man was actually telling the truth. Choi Yeon Hyuk looked as if he couldn’t believe what he was hearing. Coach Jeon would never be fooled by such acting. Coach Jeon narrowed his eyes and shouted, “Im Sang Hoon! I told you to shut your mouth. Today, you don’t have to take part in this test league. Go back to your room and cool your head!”

“...Yes, sir.”

Im Sang Hoon realized that his protest was useless in front of Coach Jeon’s yelling so he meekly lowered his head. However, if you looked closely at his eyes, you could see that he was full of fury. Im Sang Hoon stared at Choi Yeon Hyuk and Han Woo Jin and left.

The players were surprised by the sudden event. Coach Jeon clapped and got their attention.

“Ignore this matter and I’ll explain the test league. I don’t have time to answer questions so listen carefully and move. Alright?”

“Yes sir!”

The players answered loudly which echoed throughout the air outside. This showed how much influence Coach Jeon had over the players. His facial expression showed that this was what he expected.

“The test league has 32 players. Because we don’t have time, there will be no deuces, tiebreakers, or advantage points. Serves and court changes will still follow the normal game rules. As soon as you finish your match, go to the waiting area. If both you and your next opponent are finished, have a 15 minute break and then move on to your next match. Do you understand?!”

“Yes sir!”

“Ah, also.”

Coach Jeon forgot one thing and put up one finger as he continued to speak. Since he took out Im Sang Hoon, there were only 31 players.

“Since one player is out, one person gets a bye for the first game. Woo Jin who got cursed at on his first day will get the free pass. Anyone disagree?”

“...”

The players who saw Im Sang Hoon get kicked out stayed quiet. Han Woo Jin was a little bit disappointed but he didn’t want to miss this chance and decided to save his energy.

“Then let’s put Woo Jin in the first place and make it so that he moves onto the next round. The rest of you come up and grab lots.”

Coach Jeon brought a paper box out and put it on the ground. The players grabbed their lots from the box. They quickly moved and got their numbers. They then wrote their names on the whiteboard in the tournament style bracket.

“Good. The numbers are right. Because there are 30 people playing right now, if we use all of the courts, we can do all games at the same time.”

According to Coach Jeon, NK company had various outdoor tennis courts that had different kinds of environments such as clay, asphalt, and grass. There were five of

each type, so there was a total of fifteen outdoor courts.

“Starting from the right, get ready. I’ll give you ten minutes to warm up. After ten minutes, you need to start as soon as I blow the whistle.”

“Yes!”

Seeing the players getting ready at their respective courts, Han Woo Jin just sat down at the waiting area by himself. The 30 players filled up the 15 courts and it was an impressive sight to see.

Exactly 10 minutes later, Coach Jeon blew the whistle.

Pwiiiik!

As soon as the whistle was blown, green balls were immediately sent over the nets. You could only hear the sound of rackets hitting the balls on the court. Since they all were professional players, they all hit with strength and precision.

‘Luck is also an important factor in games.’

Aside from talent, there was something else that made it difficult to win various sports tournaments, including tennis. Luck was something that could play a role in helping the player win. For example, a player could go against the world champion because of bad luck and lose. Or he could go against someone with the same skill level and win with much difficulty, but he would be exhausted.

Some people already lost versus their opponents that outclassed them and had to switch sides. There were some games that would be done in 30 minutes.

“I have a better rank than what I had in my previous life already. Am I supposed to laugh?”

He mumbled to himself in his seat. There was one match that he wanted to watch.

Han Woo Jin walked outside the courts over to the clay courts to not disturb the other games. He found where Choi Yeon Hyuk was playing his match.

Because of his tall height, he could easily use a powerful overhead stroke to hit the ball with a smash to score a point.

‘Choi Yeon Hyuk.’

He was the one that helped him with Im Sang Hoon, the bald guy.

The future prince of tennis.

The tennis player who received the same contract as him.

Han Woo Jin frequently had complicated thoughts in his mind but when it came to Choi Yeon Hyuk, things were simple.

“...He’s really good.”

Bang!

You could hear the balls hit the ground loudly across all the courts, but Choi Yeon Hyuk’s hits were the loudest. Even his volley shots bounced really high in the clay court. Nobody could receive them.

His first game quickly ended with a volley shot. When Choi Yeon Hyuk was about to serve after switching sides, he noticed Han Woo Jin.

“Hey, didn’t you just get a freebie?”

“You’re the one that made me get a free ticket.”

“Uh? I guess you’re right.”

As a fully grown man, Han Woo Jin was shy about thanking Choi Yeon Hyuk for his help and Choi Yeon Hyuk was shy about receiving gratitude. The two joked with each other and laughed. Han Woo Jin hadn’t had a friend in a long time, so he felt like this was what having a ‘friend’ was like and that made him feel a little excited.

At the baseline at the end of the court, he went to Han Woo Jin and spoke to him amiably.

“Don’t worry about what happened earlier. I just didn’t like what I saw. Next time, you can stand up for yourself.”

“...Should I? Anyway, thanks.”

“No problem.”

He shyly brushed off the thanks and scratched the back of his head. He turned his attention back to his match because his opponent was ready to serve. However, Choi Yeon Hyuk had the absolute advantage.

Choi Yeon Hyuk quickly returned the ball and his opponent hit the ball too high which made it easy for him to smash the ball. He gained a point. 0:15.

This time, Choi Yeon Hyuk predicted what his opponent was going to do. His opponent's serve wasn't that fast so he was able to easily use a half-volley to score another point. 0:30.

Whether he did it on purpose or accident, he returned the ball to the line on the left side of the court. Han Woo Jin thought that he would lose this point, but to his shock, Choi Yeon Hyuk did something that surprised him.

Backhand slice.

His left knee was on the ground and right knee was bent at a 90-degree angle. He bent his body and softly hit the ball with his racket by slicing upwards. His movement was very similar to a ping-pong player's cut and the ball had an extreme curve in the air. Then it hit the center mark on the other side of the court.

The receive was picture-perfect.

Because of his skillful and artistic return ace, even his opponent couldn't help but admire the shot. His opponent realized the humongous gap between them and his shoulders dropped. That was how perfect that shot was.

0:40.

The opponent could no longer do anything. His serves no longer had any power and Choi Yeon Hyuk easily returned them with his strong forehand strokes. So Choi Yeon Hyuk easily won the second set and there was nothing left to watch. Therefore, he won the match 6-0, and 6-0 again. In the beginning, Han Woo Jin was sure that Choi Yeon Hyuk's opponent had the tenacity to at least wear down his stamina to make his later games harder, but he gave up after that one shot. Anyway, a monster like Choi Yeon Hyuk was able to move on to the next round without using much energy.

Han Woo Jin saw the board that showed which players moved on to the next round of the tournament. His eyes were focused on where he and Choi Yeon Hyuk advanced up the ladder. Luckily, they were on opposite sides. If Han Woo Jin wanted to play against him, they needed to get to the finals.

“Then my first goal will be to reach the finals.’ Almost everyone had finished their first set and was on their second set. In about 30 minutes, everyone would be done and he needed to play his match for the top 16 and onwards.

Han Woo Jin turned away from Choi Yeon Hyuk and went back to the waiting area. It was time to concentrate on himself and not the others.

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“Mr. Han Woo Jin?”

“Yes, that’s me.”

His opponent that won his match called his name. Han Woo Jin nodded his head and picked up the racket on the ground. He saw his opponent’s stats.

[Na Shin Wook]

Strength 45 / Stamina 55 / Agility 42

HP 1880/2200 SP 310/310

Forehand: 6/20

Backhand: 6/20

Serve: 5/20

Volley: 5/20

Smash: 2/20

Drop shot: 4/20

Lob: 3/20

Special Skills: None

'His forehand and backhand levels are evenly balanced. But his smash is really bad. I guess he's not good at returning overhead shots?'

Han Woo Jin's special power did not only help improve his talent and skills with hard work – it also provided him with his opponent's information. He could see his opponents' strengths and weaknesses.

Normally, you had to find your opponent's weakness after rallying back and forth with him ten or a hundred times. Yet with his special ability, he could instantly find their weaknesses. Therefore, he was able to come up with a plan to beat him.

'I have to give him serves with high bounces, and when I return shots I have to send it back up high.'

Attacking one's weakness was very common in sports. In the Ultimate Fighting Championships, George Aldo hit his opponent's shoulder which was previously injured. If he didn't attack the weakness even if he didn't know about it beforehand, it would be the same as ignoring his opponent.

"Are you ready to play?"

"Yes, I'm good to go."

A man with polite words. Na Shin Wook was sweating a little bit, but he didn't look tired. His stamina was 55. His stamina was 10 points higher than Han Woo Jin's.

Some people finished their matches and there were five empty courts. Three of them were clay courts, one was grass, and the last one was asphalt.

The asphalt court was best for high bounce shots. Grass was an irregular environment so no one liked to play on it.

"I want to play on the asphalt court, is that okay?"

"Mmm... sure, that's fine."

He looked like he was worried about Han Woo Jin finding out about his weakness so he was hesitant, but he still agreed. If he knew that Han Woo Jin already knew about

his weakness, he definitely would have refused. You could say that this was also a strategy. A strategy that only Han Woo Jin could use.

Han Woo Jin arrived at the asphalt court and put his hand over the net.

“Do you want to decide with rock paper scissors?”

“Sure.”

They didn’t need to talk about what they were deciding on.

Han Woo Jin chose rock and his opponent chose paper.

Na Shin Wook decided to serve first because he won, but his face didn’t show that he was happy about it. He looked as if he didn’t like to serve.

Before Han Woo Jin could check why he didn’t want to serve, his opponent served without warning.

Pang!

Na Shin Wook’s serve hit the other side of the court. Han Woo Jin laughed internally when he saw that the ball had no power behind it. Now he knew why his opponent didn’t want to serve.

“This man has no power with his overhead shots. A serve is done with an overhead swing. No wonder he hates doing it.”

These things could happen. There were people who didn’t understand the way their bodies moved while swinging overhead.

There were a few players like that among the pros, but his opponent knew he wasn’t good at overhead swings and that it wasn’t a smart move to serve overhead.

He clearly saw where the ball was going to land. Han Woo Jin’s body quickly twisted and moved. It was a low bounce that only came up to his waist. He couldn’t smash it. Using all his strength, he swung at the ball with a forehand stroke. The direction of his stroke was upwards which made the ball fly high into the sky.

“Eek...!”

Na Shin Wook saw the ball go high up and he couldn't help but yell in surprise, hesitating while moving backwards. He tried his best to move to where the ball was going to land and even jumped to hit the ball.

Tung!

"0:15."

"...Yes."

The ball hit the frame of his racket so the ball didn't make it over the net. Na Shin Wook acknowledged the score with a darkened face. With this one rally, Na Shin Wook knew that Han Woo Jin had found out about his weakness.

'How? Did he see my previous match?'

He had no way of knowing that Han Woo Jin could see his opponent's stats just by grabbing his racket. Han Woo Jin didn't care about Na Shin Wook's curious eyes and was ready to keep playing.

Na Shin Wook continuously lost with his weak serves, and Han Woo Jin easily returned the balls. It was an easy win.

1-0.

He lost one game and it was now Han Woo Jin's turn to serve. There was no way for Na Shin Wook to win points because Han Woo Jin kept on using lobs and volleys to force him to hit the ball overhead.

However, Na Shin Wook gritted his teeth and kept on playing. Han Woo Jin also did his best and hit the ball back and forth. This was how a pro should play. There was no such thing as consideration for your opponent. Real consideration for your opponent is using all of your strength to beat your opponent.

The total time for the match was 37 minutes and 12 seconds.

Han Woo Jin's first match ended with 6-1 and 6-2. It was a pretty good score for a finish.

"You worked hard."

“...You too.”

Na Shin Wook firmly shook Han Woo Jin’s hand. Anger, regret, sadness and disappointment, his handshake was full of complicated emotions. Na Shin Wook bowed his head while shaking his hand and left depressed.

‘I can’t evaluate his tennis skills, but he has the mentality of a pro.’

Han Woo Jin was thinking about his match just now and heard an unfamiliar voice.

[Great match! This is the first time you have won against a pro, so all of your stats go up by one.]

[Great match! You played by correctly using the opponent’s weakness. Your opponent’s weakness (weak skill) was smash. Therefore, your smash level went up by one.]

[You gained experience for the number of skills you used.]

[Volley level went up by one.]

[Lob level went up by one.]

‘Of course, beating a pro is also a big achievement. But what’s a weak skill?’

Han Woo Jin grabbed his racket and saw his status window.

[Han Woo Jin]

Strength 49 / Stamina 46 / Agility 41

HP 1680/1840 SP 390/390

Forehand: 9/20

Backhand: 4/20

Serve: 10/20

Volley: 4/20

Smash: 8/20

Drop shot: 1/20

Lob: 1/20

Special Skill: Sparrow (serve)

He got better.

That's what Han Woo Jin thought when he saw his status. Compared to the first time he checked his own status, he knew that his skill set was above the average pro because his skills and experience from when he was 33 years old were brought over to his 23-year-old body.

Yet in Han Woo Jin's opinion, a world class player like Choi Yeon Hyuk was on a completely different level.

However, he had the determination to catch up to him.

'I will win and win again. It doesn't matter if I lose. I will spend my free time practicing and I will take part in many tests to gain more experience.'

That's what Han Woo Jin thought he needed to do in order to close the gap.

"I knew you would win. Take a break."

"Hm? Uh, yeah..."

Ready for the top eight placings, Choi Yeon Hyuk tapped his shoulder while passing by. He sounded like he was confident that Han Woo Jin would win. Han Woo Jin didn't know why he kept on being nice to him even though Han Woo Jin knew about Choi Yeon Hyuk's future.

He couldn't figure out why. Han Woo Jin just thought that he shouldn't be thinking about such useless thoughts and should focus on his match instead. He went back to the waiting area.

At that time, Choi Yeon Hyuk was on the grass court and he shot a serve.

Pang!

15:0.

‘There’s nothing to see there.’

Han Woo Jin just kept walking as he heard the referee announcing points for Choi Yeon Hyuk.

A while later, the top sixteen were almost finished.

The players who were covered with sweat took off their shirts and went to the restroom to wash their face and necks. The sun was setting but the players’ bodies were more warmed up than they were during the middle of the day.

‘It’s March now but I don’t feel cold.’

Han Woo Jin felt the same. He easily won his match and got into the top 16 so he felt like he was on cloud nine. He was repeatedly squeezing the racket with his hand. He was ready to keep on playing, so his body was very hot. In other words, he was in his best condition.

His next opponent in the top 16 was very sweaty.

“Mr. Han Woo Jin?”

“Yes.”

He grabbed the racket and was able to see his opponent’s stats and skills right away.

[Lee Hyun Woo]

Strength 45 / Stamina 40 / Agility 51

HP 830/1600 SP 380/380

Forehand: 4/20

Backhand: 8/20

Serve: 7/20

Volley: 6/20

Smash: 2/20

Drop shot: 5/20

Lob: 5/20

Special Skill: None

A backhand focused style. Truthfully, in tennis, the majority of players focused on one specialty instead of being all-rounders. For example, a player who wasn't good at backhands could be really good at forehand strokes, and there were some cases of those types of people who placed in the world rankings.

Lee Hyun Wook was the kind of player that specialized in backhand. Backhand players always swing their strokes with the back of their hand facing their opponent and their forehands were usually weak in comparison to their backhands.

Normally, a person's backhand stroke is weaker than their forehand stroke. But if you swing with a backhand, you can add more spin to your stroke which can make the landing of your swing unpredictable.

'An annoying opponent.'

Han Woo Jin's current opponent was an unorthodox player whom he was uncomfortable playing against. He usually used backhand so his smash level was low, but his other skills were decent.

At least he was a little tired from his previous matches so he could play more aggressively. Han Woo Jin said, "Let's start after exactly 15 minutes."

Coach Jeon timed 15 minutes on his watch for rest. For an athlete, 15 minutes was a short amount of time to recover their energy. But since this was what the coach had said, the players couldn't complain.

"...Hooo... I'll go get some water."

“Go ahead.”

Lee Hyun Woo hurried as he realized that he couldn’t get a longer rest period. Getting as much rest as possible in this short time period was important. It would be best if he could sit down even one second faster to get more rest to be in better condition.

Yet that was impossible. Lee Hyun Woo had used more than half of his strength. He didn’t know if his previous opponents were too strong or if he just used too much energy in his previous matches.

In any case, it was good for Han Woo Jin. Since his opponent was already tired, he could easily tire them out more. Those who complained about this not being fair for him to attack his weakness had no right to speak. Only the strong could talk. Those who spoke about unfairness had no confidence in winning so they would never win regardless. The strong will win even if their weakness is targeted.

‘I will win no matter what.’

Han Woo Jin thought that those players who couldn’t win were garbage. That’s what he learned throughout his life. If you can’t win regardless of how much effort you put in, it’ll be useless because no one will recognize you.

‘That’s why I will win.’

Han Woo Jin’s kept on repeating one word in his mind.

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This time his opponent asked what court he wanted to use. Lee Hyun Woo wanted to use the clay court. Clay courts made the ball bounce less higher and it allowed the ball to travel slower for the receiver to return.

That’s why it was a favorable court for Lee Hyun Woo whose specialty was his backhand, a return stroke.

On the other hand, Han Woo Jin asked for an asphalt court so they decided with a coin toss.

Lee Hyun Woo went with heads and Han Woo Jin got tails.

The coin was flipped.

Ting!

The coin landed on top of the court and not the palm. The coin spun and landed on heads. It was the clay court that Lee Hyun Woo wanted.

‘Whooo, things don’t go as planned.’

Today a lot of things had gone in his favor, so he was a little bit expectant for things to go in his favor again. However, he now realized that he shouldn’t trust his luck and clicked tongue as he went over to the clay court.

“Who will you choose to be the server?”

“Ah, because I got the court you can serve first.”

Lee Hyun Woo might have gotten a bit confident because he got the clay court that he wanted. So he gave Han Woo Jin the first serve. Han Woo Jin didn’t like his opponent’s loose attitude, but Han Woo Jin wasn’t that upright to refuse the advantage that he was giving him.

“Let’s start.”

“Yes, start whenever you want.”

Han Woo Jin bounced the ball several times. The clay court was sturdier than he thought. He concluded that serve speed shouldn’t decrease that much.

The ball left his hand and went up into the air. As the ball came down, Han Woo Jin’s body suddenly jumped and twisted.

‘I have enough SP so it’s not a problem if I use a little bit here.’

Sparrow.

The racket hit the ball which sent it flying at an inhumane speed to the other side of the court. The ball looked like it was about to be a body shot, but it suddenly dropped at a 90-degree angle in front of Lee Hyun Woo.

Tang!

The green missile that lightly hit the clay court and flew up straight into the air. The ball passed through Lee Hyun Woo's arm and side and bounced twice on the ground without any reaction from him.

A perfect service ace. Han Woo Jin's first point.

“15:0.”

“...Yes.”

Lee Hyun Woo's eyes were downcast and serious as he was determined to hit the next serve. Han Woo Jin was excited. His opponent who gave him the advantage of serving first was now taking him seriously. Whether they were pros or amateurs, they were expected to give it their 100% which was common tennis etiquette.

However, he didn't want to use Sparrow, a serve with incredible speed and a strange spin. Nobody could return Sparrow if he didn't plan to move beforehand.

That meant that he could play mind games with the opponent.

His opponent's body is prepared to react to Sparrow, but if he doesn't use the Sparrow, his opponent would be late to react for the serve.

Compared to before, Han Woo Jin threw the ball up a little lower this time.

He used a forehand slice. Using it was a gamble, but he already knew how his opponent would move so it wasn't a big deal.

“Huh?”

Pang!

His surprised opponent blankly stared at the bouncing ball. Lee Hyun Woo's skill wasn't that bad, but he was still lacking compared to Han Woo Jin's ten years of experience.

“30:0.”

'He's shaken up.'

In Han Woo Jin's eyes, Lee Hyun Woo looked incredibly confused. If he wanted to be ready for Sparrow, he couldn't get the slice serve; but he if he wanted to get the slice serve, he couldn't get Sparrow.

If that was the case, it was best to only go for one or the other the entire game. Or he needed to hide his body language to Han Woo Jin so that he wouldn't be able to determine which serve to use.

Pang!

"Eek!"

He repeated the slice serve and the ball hit the service line, bouncing out of the court. Lee Hyun Woo's face was filled with anger. If a regular person saw his furious face, they would have felt bad. On the contrary, Han Woo Jin was happy.

Han Woo Jin knew the pain and anger of losing many games or losing points. He was happy that he was now on the other end. Those who were indifferent about losing will forever stay at their current level and won't improve.

The first game was quickly finished due to Sparrow. He used 15 SP during the game for the monster-like serve and he was able to easily beat Lee Hyun Woo who had no idea on how to counter it.

[Overwhelming game! You won a game with only service aces!]

Han Woo Jin ignored the voice in his head and put his racket on his shoulder.

"Alright, let's switch courts and serve."

"...yes..."

When the combined score of the players is at an odd number during a match, the players switch sides at odd score counts: 1-0, 1-2, 3-0, 3-2 and etc.

Han Woo Jin saw Lee Hyun Woo tightly bite his lips in frustration. His jaws were clenched tightly. He looked as if he was going to bite the ball he was holding as his eyes were burning with passion. Han Woo Jin was also fired up after he saw his expression.

‘Hooo, this won’t be easy.’

Lee Hyun Woo threw up the ball. His opponent was a lot more dangerous than the first game. This was now the second game of the first set for the top eight.

It took longer than he thought it would.

That’s what Han Woo Jin thought when he returned the ball. After he lost a game with just service aces, Lee Hyun Woo became serious and began moving.

He wasn’t thinking about the future. He was just thinking about winning the current point.

‘You can’t receive this... you don’t have any strength left.’

Looking at Lee Hyun Woo’s status window, he saw that his HP was less than 500. It was the result of him not thinking about the consequences and constantly running around.

The set was currently 5 games to 3.

The current game score was 30:15 with Han Woo Jin in the lead. As soon as Lee Hyun Woo lost the first game, he won the 2nd, 3rd and 4th games. He completely lost his stamina after the 5th game. His body was exhausted and his body couldn’t follow the orders from his brain. He did his best with every swing and so now his legs were shaking from exhaustion.

‘Because he’s tired, I have to keep on attacking.’

Han Woo Jin aimed and hit the ball opposite of where Lee Hyun Woo was in order to tire him out more.

“Keuk!”

40:15.

If he won one more point he would win the set. Also, Lee Hyun Woo didn’t have any stamina left to play the second set. Han Woo Jin had the intention of ending the game with this point and he threw up the ball as his body twisted.

He served Sparrow which Lee Hyun Woo wasn't able to receive.

Pang!

Lee Hyun Woo tried his best to react but his foot just stopped and wouldn't move. The ball hit the court and bounced to his feet.

“...I give up.”

“You worked hard.”

Lee Hyun Woo said he gave up and left. Han Woo Jin who put out his hand for a handshake was ignored as he left the court. The player who knew the feeling of a frustrating loss would get stronger. Lee Hyun Woo was a player that had the potential to grow stronger.

If Lee Hyun Woo was at full stamina it wouldn't have been easy to win the first set. His backhand style with a fast reaction was something that even Han Woo Jin had a difficult time playing against.

[This is the first time your opponent, a pro, forfeited. Therefore, all of your stats go up by one.]

[You won by using your opponent's weakness (stamina). Your stamina went up by one.]

[Due to your victory, you gained experience for all your skills.]

[Drop shot level increased by one.]

He was satisfied with his progress. At least that's what Han Woo Jin thought. He used his stamina a little bit but he got a long rest break because he finished his match in one set. Moreover, his stamina stat went up by two so his rough breathing became calmer.

[Han Woo Jin]

Strength 50 / Stamina 48 / Agility 42

HP 1305/1920 SP 280/400

Forehand: 9/20

Backhand: 4/20

Serve: 10/20

Volley: 5/20

Smash: 8/20

Drop Shot: 2/20

Lob: 2/20

Special Skill: Sparrow

He used Sparrow eight times during the match. Sparrow cost 15 SP per use so he can use it 18 more times.

He was preparing for the top four semifinals, so Han Woo Jin drank the warm water in his water bottle.

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“Eeeyah, how long has it been since newbies got this far?”

He reeked of alcohol.

Han Woo Jin had no intention of hiding his displeasure and scowled at the smell. Earlier, when the players were gathered, he saw [Hungover] in some of their status windows and that man was one of them.

[Park Chang Jin] [Hungover]

Strength 52 (-8) / Stamina 47(-10) / Agility 48(-8)

HP 925/1880 SP 300/300

Forehand: 8/20

Backhand: 2/20

Serve: 8/20

Smash: 7/20

Drop Shot: 2/20

Lob: 3/20

Special skill: None

“Son of a bitch.”

Han Woo Jin mumbled under his breath.

How could a pro player smell like alcohol on the court?

It was the punk who never cared about the basic etiquette for sports regardless of his skill.

Furthermore, he spoke in a drunken tone and kept talking.

“Hey, aren’t you going to answer me?”

There was no reason to respond. It was the same as the bald guy. They were amateurs who had no respect for the sport.

Han Woo Jin’s eyes were filled with anger.

“Ha! Alright. You come see me after this.”

Park Chang Jin who was talking to himself suddenly threw up the ball. He skipped the formalities and just decided to serve first.

Pang!

Han Woo Jin saw the ball hit the service court grit his teeth in anger.

Pabang!

Rising. As soon as the ball bounced on his side of the court, Han Woo Jin immediately hit the ball and the ball hit the ground next to Park Chang Jin's foot.

"0:15."

"Uh... hey, don't you know this is practice? You can serve first."

Park Chang Jin shamelessly said this as he was the one who served first in order to score a point and handed the ball over to him. But Han Woo Jin wasn't a pushover.

He ignored the hand that was over the net with the ball and said, "It's 15:0. If you say one more word, I will go speak to the coach to go check the camera. Shut your damn mouth and keep serving, you drunk!"

"What... what are you going to do?"

Park Chang Jin was surprised that Han Woo Jin suddenly began speaking rudely and even cursed at him. How could he speak like that to his senior? Was this brat cursing him? This was the first time since he had entered this company. He couldn't curse back at him because he knew that Coach Jeon was watching them so he kept his mouth shut, but he wore a furious expression.

"Han Woo Jin... you son of a bitch, I won't let you go."

"Bullshit."

Han Woo Jin cut him off with one word. He was still hungover so his body swayed. Also, he was really angry so he couldn't correctly hit the ball.

He hit the net twice which resulted in a fault. His next serve was countered with Rising which was a return ace for Han Woo Jin.

"0:30."

"This fucker...!"

This rally was something where anyone could see who the winner was. His weak serves were always returned with Rising and as soon as Han Woo Jin returned the serve, it resulted in a return ace. The result would be unknown if Park Chang Jin's status was normal, but because he was hungover, he couldn't beat Han Woo Jin right

now.

The first set was finished with 6-0. Park Chang Jin immediately glared at him with his fierce eyes said, "You rude bastard... Do you think you're good? Do you think you won because you're good at tennis?"

"No, I won because you're retarded."

Park Chang Jin trembled in anger after he heard the junior that he saw for the first time today call him a retard. He threw his racket.

"That's right, you fucker! You won! But let's see if you'll be cocky next time!"

Hearing the threat from him, Han Woo Jin's face darkened. Park Chang Jin thought that seeing his expression change meant that he was now scared.

"...pick up your racket."

"What?"

"I said pick up your racket you retarded shit!"

"...Aiish! This asshole!"

Han Woo Jin pointed at his racket and Park Chang Jin ran over to Han Woo Jin. He grabbed the cuff of his shirt. The two players tumbled onto the ground, and as the players started surrounding them, Coach Jeon ran over and separated them.

"Han Woo Jin! Park Chang Jin! What are you two punks doing?!"

"Hey, Woo Jin! Let him go!"

"Senior Chang Jin! What are you doing?"

Choi Yeon Hyuk pulled Han Woo Jin back. And two other players pulled Park Chang Jin's arms back. They weren't at the point of hitting each other so they weren't injured. Fighting would be a big problem if they fought on the court.

Coach Jeon Sang Shik was seriously angry and he shouted at them.

“Do you think this is the neighborhood playground? You punks! Are you in your right minds?!”

“.....”

The two men didn’t say anything. Han Woo Jin really didn’t want to talk to Park Chang Jin and Park Chang Jin didn’t want to escalate the problem further because it was his fault so he stayed quiet.

Coach Jeon looked at the two people were looking down without saying anything until he smelled alcohol.

“...Alcohol?”

Park Chang Jin’s face paled. As soon as he saw Park Chang Jin’s face pale, he discovered the reason for the fight and Coach Jeon furiously roared at him.

“Park Chang Jin! Did you just come to the court while drunk?!”

“C-coach!”

“Get out of here! Before I force you out!”

Park Chang Jin immediately left since he knew that nobody could go against Coach Jeon when he was starting to get crazy. Han Woo Jin didn’t like that he didn’t pick up his racket off the court. He didn’t want to from the game he played with him.

However, the status voice spoke.

[You have gained experience in all of your skills due to your opponent’s forfeit.]

[Your smash level went up by one.]

Suddenly, a tough hand grabbed the cuff of his shirt. Coach Jeon’s wrinkled face was in front of him. Coach Jeon spoke right into his ear in anger while clenching his teeth.

“Han Woo Jin. No matter how much of a bastard your opponent is, you have to have self-control... that’s what a pro is. Do you understand?”

“...Yes, Coach.”

After he answered, he let him go. His neck stung because of the tight grip on his clothes.

“The final game will be in 30 minutes. Rest until then.”

“Coach, who’s my opponent?”

Han Woo Jin already knew but he asked anyway. He just wanted to release the awkward atmosphere and wanted to confirm who he was thinking about.

Coach Jeon turned and just walked before answering him.

“Don’t you already know?”

That was true.

Chapter 5

Genius and Untalented

After Coach Jeon left, Han Woo Jin sat in the waiting area. He could handle his physical exhaustion but he couldn't deal with his mental fatigue.

When he tumbled on the ground with Park Chang Jin, he scraped his cheek so he felt a stinging pain. Han Woo Jin raised his shoulder and tried to rub his cheek.

“Aigoo, don’t do that. It might get infected.”

Someone behind him handed him a towel with a joking tone. Han Woo Jin wiped his cheek with the towel from Choi Yeon Hyuk and turned his head around.

He felt awkward because he never received this kind of treatment before. Not to mention, the person who helped him was Choi Yeon Hyuk.

“...Thanks.”

The sweat, dirt, and blood were mixed so the towel quickly became dirty. Choi Yeon Hyuk began speaking to him while sitting next to him.

“You’re pretty hotheaded. I thought you were a cool person.”

“Not really. When I get angry, I get angry, and when I don’t have anything to say I don’t say anything.”

Han Woo Jin answered with a dry tone.

He was an untalented player who kept to himself for ten years. In the Korean sports world, the relationship between seniors and juniors was quite strict, so the players who didn’t conform to the social hierarchy were ostracized.

He entered the tennis world with a pure heart, but during his ten years of play, he closed his heart off from others and only thought about tennis.

The people that told him that he didn't have a social life or friends were those who had no idea what they were talking about. Han Woo Jin's broken heart could not be mended in just one or two days.

If it was someone else, they would leave just him, but Choi Yeon Hyuk just nodded.

"I understand, the guy from earlier can't even be called a tennis player. Don't you think so?"

Han Woo Jin was very surprised by his words. Choi Yeon Hyuk had etiquette and had polite manners with a bright face. Yet he completely changed in front of him.

'...is this his real face?'

Choi Yeon Hyuk was smirking. He coldly looked at the players who were waiting to watch the finals. Among them were the two people who caused trouble with Han Woo Jin and they had ugly expressions.

"I can't stand the fact that I am treated on the same level as them. You and I are not like those people."

Pride, arrogance, confidence, and condescension. Choi Yeon Hyuk's voice contained a variety of emotions that traveled to Han Woo Jin's ears. His voice was soft but it sharply hit his heart.

'Ah, so that's what he feels.'

Han Woo Jin just laughed.

He understood why Choi Yeon Hyuk was speaking to him like this. Also, he knew that this was an act of friendship from him. That's why he couldn't help but laugh.

"Then what about them?"

Han Woo Jin pointed at the players who passed by them. Choi Yeon Hyuk didn't even turn his head and opened his mouth.

"They're a group of beggars. I'm sick and tired of these poor bastards that can't even win a single tournament in this country or around the world."

“...beggars.”

Han Woo Jin always knew that he was at the bottom and was used to being looked down upon from those at the top. Han Woo Jin was never above anybody else.

Yet today he found out how cold and uncaring those at the top saw those on the bottom.

In his past life, ten years ago, in Choi Yeon Hyuk’s eyes, he probably also saw him as a beggar.

A beggar who was not worth remembering. He, who played for ten years, never won anything.

‘Is this what those geniuses think?’

It was a harsh world where nothing mattered except for talent. On the outside, Choi Yeon Hyuk was a kind man with impeccable manners, but on the inside, he was someone with a dark side filled with talent and contempt for those weaker than him. No, it could be that he didn’t know that he had these dark thoughts.

Han Woo Jin was completely different. He who came from the bottom could kind of understand what Choi Yeon Hyuk was thinking about.

He could do whatever he wanted and accomplish any goal. How pathetic were the people who always failed? He definitely didn’t care about their talents and efforts as they were a waste.

“Am I different?”

“Hm? You? Of course you’re different. That’s why the president called us and gave us a different contract.”

Choi Yeon Hyuk happily put his arm over Woo Jin’s shoulder and patted it. His action seemed very friendly and if a person didn’t hear their previous conversation, they would think that they were good friends.

“Is there about 15 minutes left? I’ll start warming up first. Come over later.”

He saw Choi Yeon Hyuk’s back as he was walking away and gripped his racket. He

could see his status in front of him.

His total stats were almost at 180 and his skill level total was 64. Furthermore, he had a special skill like himself. His potential was at an unreachable level. Although he reached the finals, he didn't even show half of his skills.

‘To think that I am treated on the same level as this monster.’

Han Woo Jin felt both excited and depressed.

‘We aren’t the same.’

As soon as Choi Yeon Hyuk was out of sight, Han Woo Jin saw his own status window. Now he could distinguish the status window and his surroundings.

“Even without looking at it, I can tell that he’s better than me.”

A world-class genius.

He would become the future prince of tennis that would place as the runner-up for Wimbledon.

Although this was ten years in the future and he currently didn’t have the same experience as the tennis prince that he would become, he was still an amazing player.

“...Aish.”

Han Woo Jin mumbled as he looked up at the sky with depressed eyes.

He couldn’t see himself winning.

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The sun was high up in the sky when the test league began but now the sun was already setting. All the outdoor lights were turned on but there still would be some vision problems for the players. That’s why it was decided that the finals would be held inside.

The two people who were kicked out earlier were also present. All 32 players were seated and were waiting for the finals to start.

They would always have a test league whenever new players joined. The rookies got to this test league's finals. This was the first time for this to have ever happened in NK company history. That's why those who were sitting in the stands were all excited.

Of course, there would always be haters who would doubt their skills.

"Ha, how lucky could they be to have gotten to the finals? Did you guys even try?"

"I don't care about them. They're probably nothing special. Who wants to get some chicken and beer after this?"

Im Sang Hoon and Park Chang Jin who were scolded by Coach Jeon were the ones that started the commotion to distract everyone else. This time, someone stopped them.

It was Lee Hyun Woo who played against Han Woo Jin in the top eight. He had been at NK company since a long time ago and he had higher seniority than Im Sang Hoon and Park Chang Jin.

"Both of you stop talking and just watch. If you want to talk that badly, then leave."

The two people stopped talking. They were surprised by Lee Hyun Woo's attitude as it was different from usual.

Park Chang Jin spoke first.

"Hyun Woo hyung, are you taking their side?"

"Since when was tennis a sport about taking sides? Chang Jin, if you don't stop drinking and start practicing, it'll be hard for you to pass this quarter."

"Gosh, seriously...!"

Lee Hyun Woo pointed out a serious fact and that got him to quiet down.

At that time, Coach Jeon came inside with a jumper on.

He just counted the number of players sitting in the stands and nodded.

"Good, you're all here. How do you guys feel?"

The main characters of the finals. Han Woo Jin and Choi Yeon Hyuk looked at each other from the opposite ends of the court. They didn't turn their heads even though Coach Jeon was speaking to them; their eyes were fired up.

Han Woo Jin's eyes were very dark compared to Choi Yeon Hyuk's eyes which were very bright. They contrasted each other.

‘Choi Yeon Hyuk looks more excited. Woo Jin seems a bit down?’

Jeon Sang Shik tilted his head at his unexpected expression. Nonetheless, he decided to go ahead with the finals.

“Choose who serves first with rock paper scissors.”

The two players slowly walked to the net from the baseline. 186 cm Choi Yeon Hyuk and 177 cm Han Woo Jin — their eye heights were very different. The two began shaking their hands.

Han Woo Jin chose rock and Choi Yeon Hyuk chose paper. Choi Yeon Hyuk would serve first.

“This time we will have a best of two out of three for the finals. We won't have deuces and extended rules because of physical exhaustion. Other than that, everything is the same. Are you ready?”

“Yes.”

“Yes!”

Choi Yeon Hyuk was fired up and excited to play compared to Han Woo Jin who seemed unexcited. Coach Jeon was excited to see the match between these two players.

“Okay, go to your spots.”

The two turned their backs toward each other and walked. They looked like those western cowboys about to head into a gun duel. They both walked slowly and looked nervous.

As soon as they arrived at the service line, a ball was thrown to Choi Yeon Hyuk. As he received the ball, he grabbed it really tightly. You could see his veins popping on his

arms.

‘He’s serious,’ Han Woo Jin thought. ‘He will use a different serve from before.’

“Alright, first set, first game... start!” Coach Jeon shouted, and the ball flew out from Choi Yeon Hyuk’s hand. Seeing him throw the ball, Han Woo Jin’s back was covered with sweat as if it was a block of melting ice.

Han Woo Jin instinctively widened his eyes. He saw Choi Yeon Hyuk’s racket hit the ball.

Pabang!

“...15:0!”

Everybody except for Choi Yeon Hyuk stopped thinking. What happened just now? It looked like somebody erased the scene of Choi Yeon Hyuk’s serve from everyone’s minds.

‘What kind of speed...!’

Han Woo Jin was the one who was the most surprised after seeing the ball in front of him. He remembered Choi Yeon Hyuk’s fastest serve ever was 242 km/h. It was at the highest level in the world ranks. How can he hit the ball like that even though he just entered the company?

Choi Yeon Hyuk’s eyes were speaking to him, and he saw Han Woo Jin’s astonished expression.

‘If it’s you, you can return it, right?’

Choi Yeon Hyuk looked at Han Woo Jin expectantly. This hurt his pride badly. Choi Yeon Hyuk was a genius but he didn’t know that Han Woo Jin had ten years worth of experience. If he lost this game, that would mean that his ten years was practically worthless.

‘His serve isn’t anything special. It’s just really fast.’

However, he could not ignore the speed. Like in baseball, a fastball has incredible power and its only strong point is being fast.

Yet a fastball has a weakness.

Whether in baseball or tennis, if an incredibly fast ball or serve was returned, it would be impossible for the server to get to it. That's why experienced players predict where the ball will go and position their bodies accordingly.

As long as it was not a curveball and the player can predict the timing and the place, it will land where the player can always return it.

'It's coming.'

Choi Yeon Hyuk tossed the ball up.

He was also very tall and he hit the ball with an overhead stroke so he couldn't even react to the speed.

The ball was hit diagonally across the court and Han Woo Jin immediately ran. As soon as he hit the ball with his racket, his foot twisted and he pushed the ball back.

Han Woo Jin's body was behind the service line, and as soon as the ball hit the court he reflexively swung his racket.

Tung!

'Ack, it hurts!'

The ball barely hit the outside of the racket and went out of bounds. Han Woo Jin clenched his teeth as he felt a sharp pain in his wrist. Since the ball didn't hit the sweet spot on his racket, he felt the pain from the impact of the ball all the way to his wrist.

At least received the serve. It was not on purpose, but the return was a drop shot. Choi Yeon Hyuk should not have been able to reach the ball from his position. [1]

Pang!

'...No way.'

"3-30:0!"

Coach Jeon announced the score with a trembling voice. This wasn't a match that could

be played by newbies. The quality of this match was good enough to be in the finals of a Korean tournament.

Han Woo Jin's face turned ugly after he saw the ball bounce next to his right foot. No, he was surprised to see the large shadow in front of the net. Choi Yeon Hyuk was already in front of the net as he hit the ball.

“...Serve and volley?”

“I really like serving and moving right up to the net.”

Choi Yeon Hyuk smiled confidently. He deserved it. Serve and volley wasn't a technique that a random amateur or new pro could use. Furthermore, as soon as he hit the fast serve, he immediately returned the drop shot that was right in front of the net. If Han Woo Jin succeeded in his drop shot he probably would have gained several levels in it.

‘Drop shots won't do.’ Han Woo Jin lost multiple points from the serve and volley. He needed to make it so that Choi Yeon Hyuk couldn't return the ball with a volley. Otherwise, he couldn't just continue to rally with him.

In his mind, he began to come up with a way to counter his opponent's playstyle. Han Woo Jin couldn't compete with physique and technique against Choi Yeon Hyuk, the only thing he could use was strategy.

Choi Yeon Hyuk threw the ball up again. This time he just used a standing serve because the repeated use of a jumping serve exhausted his stamina.

Pang!

His speed dropped a little and he already knew where the ball would land. Han Woo Jin hit the ball quickly as soon as it bounced. Rising strike.

‘He's already at the net!’

Han Woo Jin saw Choi Yeon Hyuk's huge figure move. His quick speed and confidence in his net play made Han Woo Jin nervous.

Choi Yeon Hyuk received the ball with his backhand that was heading towards the left side of the court. His backhand was as strong as his forehand. Han Woo Jin received the ball with a volley.

Yet he wasn't used to using volley so the rally didn't last long. Han Woo Jin made the mistake of hitting the ball with the frame of his racket and lost a point. 40:0.

“...Are they really newbies?”

“They must've gotten special training when they were young.”

The audience slowly began to change their opinions about them. As pro players, they understood how high the level of their play was. Those who played against Han Woo Jin and Choi Yeon Hyuk especially felt more admiration.

“Choi Yeon Hyuk will definitely win this match. When I played against him, I thought I was playing against a world ranker. Forehand, backhand, serve and slice. He's perfect. He has no weaknesses.”

“Han Woo Jin is also good. If you saw his strange serve, you wouldn't say that.”

“No, regardless of his serve...”

Their voices right now sounded more like anxious chattering compared to the idle chattering from before. Coach Jeon had no intention of stopping them from talking because he too was nervous. The higher the level a game is, usually the more excited the viewers become.

The viewers stopped talking as soon as Choi Yeon Hyuk threw the ball. It was sudden throughout the entire court, but it was broken by the sharp swing of the racket hitting the ball.

Pang!

Jump serve. Jumping as high as a basketball player, as soon as the ball bounced, before Han Woo Jin was able to get into position, the ball was already far away from him. Though it was the same serve, the speed and the angle were drastically different.

“1-0! First game goes to Choi Yeon Hyuk! Switch sides and serve!”

Han Woo Jin's rally was consistent but he didn't even score a single point. Han Woo Jin clenched his teeth and switched sides. Choi Yeon Hyuk threw him the balls.

“Woo Jin, could you show me that?”

“What?”

He put his racket on his shoulder. He looked like a fierce predator looking at its prey.

“The serve that you used at the entrance exam. Use it on me.”

Choi Yeon Hyuk was asking him to use Sparrow.

As soon as they switched sides, Coach Jeon spoke.

“First set, second game, Han Woo Jin serve! Start!”

Sparrow.

Han Woo Jin thought for a moment.

‘Is it alright for me to use this as my first serve? Even if it’s Choi Yeon Hyuk.’

He cannot return Sparrow’s speed and angle. Sparrow was a serve that could make the user’s wrist numb; that’s how strong it was.

Yet he couldn’t help but feel nervous. The genius in front of him was like a huge mountain towering over him. Choi Yeon Hyuk was not someone that Han Woo Jin could predict.

‘Anyway, I’ll do a regular shot first.’

Han Woo Jin tossed the ball up. A regular overhead serve. His level 10 serve was a little bit better than Choi Yeon Hyuk’s. His speed and precision could not be ignored. If his physique was just a little bit better he could have served even faster than Choi Yeon Hyuk.

However, that was up to the opponent.

As soon as Choi Yeon Hyuk realized that it was a regular serve, he ran into the service court. It was only two steps. He only took two steps to get into a perfect position to receive the ball.

The ball was hit in the service court and was returned right away by his racket. The ball was sent back with a strong spin onto the court.

“Slice!”

Pang!

“0:15!”

Hearing Coach Jeon’s voice, Han Woo Jin looked at Choi Yeon Hyuk. He gave him a look as if he was saying, ‘You can’t beat me with that.’ That made Han Woo Jin angry.

‘Alright. If you want it that much, I’ll give it to you.’

As soon as he made the decision, he threw the ball up. The ball was tossed up high above Han Woo Jin’s head, different from the previous serve. Choi Yeon Hyuk’s eyes brightened in excitement.

As soon as the ball was about to drop, Han Woo Jin’s body twisted drastically diagonally. His whole body twisted starting from his ankle up to his waist and shoulder. It almost looked like a smash but it had a more downward swing to it. That was Sparrow.

Pang!

The ball flew in a straight line and hit the other side of the court.

“15:15!”

‘Good, he can’t return it. I’ll win this game using Sparrow.’

Han Woo Jin checked the amount of SP he had left.

SP 265/400

He could use Sparrow 17 more times. If he finished the game only using service aces, he can win four games.

Han Woo Jin threw the ball up high once again to use Sparrow. Coach Jeon and the players who were watching him couldn’t breathe because they didn’t want to miss a single thing he did.

Only one person, Choi Yeon Hyuk, was closely looking at the ball and the way Han Woo

Jin's body was moving.

Pabang!

He couldn't even see the ball hit the court. Choi Yeon Hyuk still didn't move. It's not that he couldn't move. He just didn't.

Thirty minutes into the game, Han Woo Jin realized why Choi Yeon Hyuk didn't move when he used Sparrow.

"6-4! Set, Choi Yeon Hyuk!"

You could hear Coach Jeon's voice echo as the entire indoor court was silent. Previously, all the players were chatting and discussing about who they thought would win. However, nobody could speak now.

On the court, Han Woo Jin was drenched in sweat with both hands on his bent knees. In contrast, Choi Yeon Hyuk looked calm and was breathing comfortably.

Up to the second, no, up to the third game, no one knew who would win. However, since the start of the fourth game, the balance was broken and things had changed. Yet the fact that he was able to win four games was all thanks to Sparrow.

SP 35/410

Since he won four games, his serve level went up to 11. But he only had enough SP left for two more Sparrows.

If he served normally without using Sparrow, he would lose to the return ace. Finally, Han Woo Jin knew that there was a huge mountain in front of him. He couldn't help it as he had to keep moving forward.

The person who was serving usually won the game and the wins went back and forth. However, Choi Yeon Hyuk interrupted the pattern when he figured out the trick behind Sparrow's curve. Whenever Han Woo Jin used Sparrow, there wasn't a return ace, but Choi Yeon Hyuk was able to return his Sparrow soon enough and their rallies grew longer and longer as Han Woo Jin became more exhausted.

His shoulders were moving up and down from his rough breathing. Bullets of sweat were dropping off his bright red face. His hand that was holding the racket was at its

limit as it was trembling. Since he had been running around so much, his leg muscles were also starting to cramp up.

Could you say that this is the look of a pro after just one set?

However, the people watching in the stands couldn't laugh at all.

If they were in his shoes, could they do any better? Thinking about that question, nobody thought they could.

30 minutes had passed since the game had started.

Choi Yeon Hyuk was finally able to receive Sparrow, and Han Woo Jin couldn't do anything about it. He had nothing left to use. It was obvious who would win the next set and win the match.

The world of sports was cold. The injured player's weakness was always targeted. Han Woo Jin, who was exhausted, looked like a predator that had lost its fangs. Coach Jeon felt bad for Han Woo Jin as he looked at him and he had a feeling that Han Woo Jin wouldn't give up. So he hurriedly started the second set.

"Second set start! Han Woo Jin start serve!"

With his trembling hand, he received the ball. He could barely toss the ball up.

Yet he was still able to somehow perform his serve and got a return ace.

He didn't even think about giving up.

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He continued to lose points.

Pang... Pabang... Pang... Pang!

The ball went and forth over the net. It hit the court and then finally bounced outside. Han Woo Jin tried his best to return the ball as he swung his racket, but the racket flew out of his hands and hit the ground.

He looked extremely pathetic, but his figure was very admirable to look at.

Some people watching in the stands couldn't help but clench their fists as they watched this difficult match; they felt that it was tense.

'Isn't this just a practice game? You've done more than enough.'

Not only did the viewers think of this, but it also went through Han Woo Jin's mind as well. This wasn't a big match; it was only a practice game for the company. Was there a reason for one to be playing oneself to death?

The temptation coming from his head was starting to influence his playing and his body became more lethargic. Ever since he traveled back into the past, he had never lost a game so his body and mind wanted to give up on this match thinking that he had won enough already. Han Woo Jin picked up his racket from the ground, but he had no more strength.

It was Choi Yeon Hyuk's turn to serve.

Pang!

'I have to get it... '

His body ran to the ball unconsciously. His breath came up to his throat and his uniform was stuck to his body like a wet towel. But Han Woo Jin's body moved to receive the ball. The ball hit the court, bounced, and hit the center of his racket.

Tang!

However, Han Woo Jin's racket was the one that flew away, not the ball. Since he didn't have any strength left in his hand, he let go of his racket and the ball didn't go over the net. It rolled on the ground.

"Game, Choi Yeon Hyuk! 0-2! Han Woo Jin serve!"

'Should I give up?'

Han Woo Jin was seriously thinking about giving up. There was no need to try this hard in a practice match. He also knew that he could not win this match. The fact that he was still standing on this court was out of sheer will.

His eyes were trembling, his vision was blurry, and his burning skin covered with

sweat.

However, above all that, there was something else that was pressing down on his shoulders.

HP 640/1920 SP 35/410

It was his status window that was showing the amount of stamina he had left.

HP 1310/2400 SP 640/640

Furthermore, compared to himself, he could see Choi Yeon Hyuk's status, which was the largest stress inducer for Han Woo Jin.

'Let's give up.'

He felt that the status window was whispering to him,

. It was telling him that his effort and time was lacking by a huge margin.

'I know that much.'

There was no way for a normal person to beat a genius. Who knew better than him who wasted ten years of his life to figure out this cold hard truth?

Even though he now had special powers, the world of geniuses was incomparably high. Choi Yeon Hyuk was the best of the best who had no opponents anywhere in Korea.

-Okay, let's give up. It's time to take a step back today. I can gain more experience and raise my levels while in tournaments. Even if I lose now, can't I win later? That's what this system promised.

This was just a sweet temptation.

The last shred of self-esteem that he had was destroyed during those ten years. However, this new system brought back hope.

-It's ridiculous that I serve with all my strength but it returns with a return ace.

-It's ridiculous that I used all my strength in my smash but it was returned with a volley.

-I lobbed it all the way back to the baseline and even used a perfect drop shot, but Choi Yeon Hyuk only took three steps to return it.

-He even easily returned the special skill called Sparrow.

He completely destroyed the system that Han Woo Jin had faith in and showed that it was nothing.

...Anyway, he never liked giving up.

He lived the past ten years crawling on the dirt ground.

He put everything on the line on tennis even though his family and friends told him not to.

He played over 1,000 matches and he never gave up a single match.

That's why...

'Shut up for a moment'

He forcefully clenched his trembling hand. As he tightly gripped his racket, the grip on it twisted.

This was the first time since he returned to the past that he turned off the status window.

His head was suddenly clear as the numbers and letters disappeared. He released a hot breath of air as he let go of the breath that was stuck in his throat. His legs that were about to collapse suddenly regained strength. Due to the disappearance of the status window that was showing him the harsh reality of things, the heavy boulder that was on his psychological shoulders disappeared. Was this what was called a runner's high? That's what Han Woo Jin felt as he felt a strange energy coursing through his body.

As he let out rough breaths, he straightened his back and looked directly straight in front of him. You could see the side of his mouth rise up a little on his red face.

'I was stupid thinking I could win in a fair match. Regardless of the system, I should have played with my own style.'

He gripped his racket, held it diagonally, and grabbed the ball. It was his turn to serve.

'I can't win a fair match.'

If Han Woo Jin was an infantryman, then Choi Yeon Hyuk would be a tank. Of course, if those two fought, the tank would crush the infantryman.

'I'll show you a cool trick.'

Han Woo Jin had a mischievous look on his face.

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'Is this as far as he can go?'

The excited Choi Yeon Hyuk couldn't help but let out a sigh. It had been a long time since he went all out so he was breathing heavily. This meant that Choi Yeon Hyuk's opponent had very good skills.

Han Woo Jin.

Choi Yeon Hyuk was interested in him ever since he saw the strange serve during the exam. Even Choi Yeon Hyuk didn't think that he could copy that serve or return it.

How long had it been since he was this excited because he saw a player who could serve like that?

Ever since he was young, Choi Yeon Hyuk was capable of doing anything. When he was in middle school, he beat the high school seniors so much that it wasn't a big deal for him. After he became a high schooler, he registered himself up at a pro tennis court and beat everyone there.

100 games and 100 victories.

To this young genius, having 100 victories definitely made him arrogant.

'Korea doesn't have any decent tennis players.'

It didn't take that long for him to realize that. Nobody could block his talent and skills, and therefore his arrogance kept rising.

Choi Yeon Hyuk, who had a lot of experience from the country junior tournaments, heard some good news one day.

The NK company president was preparing some sort of great sponsor project for tennis.

The news from one of the NK company's players was enough to convince him to go to NK company. The amount of money to support a tennis player's career was too much for him and his family. But if NK company became his sponsor, it would only be the price of a pack of gum for them.

Choi Yeon Hyuk wanted to show them his worth. And at that exam, he met a player whom he was interested in for the first time.

It was Han Woo Jin.

'His height is about 177 to 178 cm. He's a little skinny and his arms and legs aren't that long... but his skills aren't bad.'

Compared to him, Han Woo Jin had a worse physique, but his skill was good enough.

It might have been at that time. He could finally call someone his [Rival].

A few days later, he participated in the test league after he entered the company. He was lucky too.

Han Woo Jin easily got into the finals with him.

That's why he thought this was his chance to judge his skills to see if Han Woo Jin was good enough to become his rival.

'...Was I excited for nothing?'

He was close to winning this match, so that was good. But he also felt disappointed. He had run ahead too quickly expecting people to follow him, but when he turned around, nobody was there.

Choi Yeon Hyuk gripped his racket with a disappointed face. If his opponent won't give up, he needed to crush his opponent.

Han Woo Jin's stamina was almost spent. He easily returned his powerless serve.

'Does he have the mentality to never give up? But his mentality to never give up means nothing because he can't win.'

While Choi Yeon Hyuk was thinking about ending the game, he suddenly saw something.

Their eyes met.

'...what's that?'

Choi Yeon Hyuk stepped back unconsciously. Just a little bit earlier his opponent's eyes were muddle-headed, but now they were strangely bright.

What was the thing that was praiseworthy? That Han Woo Jin made him step back with his spirit or that Choi Yeon Hyuk stepped back on instinct?

Han Woo Jin threw up the ball.

The way the racket swung was a little different from before. It meant that his body stamina had been exhausted.

Choi Yeon Hyuk ran up and was filled with nervousness.

That was how the third game of the second set began.

It was Han Woo Jin's turn to serve.

He didn't use Sparrow. It was a normal serve with mediocre speed that arrived at Choi Yeon Hyuk's side of the court. Choi Yeon Hyuk took one step backward and twisted his racket diagonally with the intention to quickly finish this rally.

With Rising, he swiftly returned the ball back to the other side of the court. Up until now, Han Woo Jin had yet to successfully return his Rising as he attempted to use volleys to return it.

'I've seen that move over 20 times, and I still can't return Choi Yeon Hyuk's swings with my current skill level.

'I might be able to do it after my skills and stats go up.'

It was a meaningless assumption from the present Han Woo Jin. He needed to change his strategy right away.

The ball that Choi Yeon Hyuk hit arrived at Han Woo Jin's right side. Han Woo Jin didn't have any strength left to snap the ball and return it. The only thing he could do was drop shots.

Therefore, he decided to just completely stop using snaps.

Pang!

Han Woo Jin received the ball and hit it straight. The ball wasn't headed for the court but right at Choi Yeon Hyuk's body. It was a body shot.

"Ugh...!"

Although Han Woo Jin couldn't hit the ball with all his strength, the speed wasn't something to laugh at. If a ball at that speed hit his body, if the person wasn't ready for that ball, they would be stunned. This wasn't talent, but it was something that required experience.

Choi Yeon Hyuk, who was inexperienced with this type of situation, hurriedly put up his racket to receive the ball. As he blocked the ball, the ball flew in an arch over to Han Woo Jin which allowed him to easily use a smash.

'Shit!'

Pang!

"15:0!"

Han Woo Jin hit the ball without any hesitation. It was the first point that Han Woo Jin scored without using Sparrow.

Han Woo Jin saw Choi Yeon Hyuk's frustrated expression and smiled.

Choi Yeon Hyuk kept on using Rising because of Han Woo Jin's continuous drop shots, and those resulted in more body shots. It was impossible for him to get used to the body shots in such a short period of time. Only players who experienced getting body-shotted tens of hundreds of times could return it.

Han Woo Jin was able to use and return body shots. His present body was that of a young rookie, but on the inside, he was a pro who had ten years of experience.

“Game, Han Woo Jin! 1-2! Change courts!”

As soon as they switched sides, Choi Yeon Hyuk served with a nervous expression. Although he was winning, he had a feeling that he was actually losing. Han Woo Jin swang the racket to return his powerful and quick serve.

Serve and volley. Choi Yeon Hyuk's favorite move was to run right up to the net after serving.

However, Choi Yeon Hyuk was scared of receiving a body shot.

‘What if Han Woo Jin hits the ball to my body or face?’

‘I need to keep my distance.’

Choi Yeon Hyuk stopped moving his feet.

Han Woo Jin used a light drop shot as he saw that and the ball went over the net. It was as if he was mocking him.

“0:15!”

Even though he was a player with an amazing physique and technique, he would be perplexed if he encountered a strategy he'd never seen before.

Han Woo Jin used his inexperience against him.

He coordinated and utilized his body shots along with the drop shots, and he easily won the fourth game. Han Woo Jin took a deep breath.

‘It's better now. I got my breath back.’

The rallies didn't last long, and Han Woo Jin didn't need to move around that much so he was able to save his strength. However, the score right now was 2-2. He needed to win this set so that they could go to the last set.

It was Han Woo Jin's turn to serve again.

Choi Yeon Hyuk was able to easily receive his serves, but after his returns, he kept on making mistakes. He couldn't properly receive the body shots that were aimed right at his face and chest. In addition, he was also too far away to reach the drop shots.

The viewers who were in the stands were now feeling conflicted. The game was completely different compared to before.

"What's that? Isn't that cheating?"

"What do you mean? Body shots aren't cheating, it's a strategy."

"But it's such a cheap move."

Some people were cursing Han Woo Jin's plays while the others were either supporting him or just analyzing his playstyle. There were various emotions. Coach Jeon was on the supporting side for Han Woo Jin.

'All plays except fouls are fair play. Also, players need to do everything they can to win. Han Woo Jin's dirty play is a reasonable strategy'

Until now, Choi Yeon Hyuk was playing with great talent and skill and he won every game. Nobody ever played like this against Choi Yeon Hyuk. That's why he had no idea about what to do.

In front of Coach Jeon who was calmly watching the match in front of him, another game went to Han Woo Jin.

"Game, Han Woo Jin! 3-2! Change sides!"

The favor was now with Han Woo Jin. Han Woo Jin was now in the lead coming from a disadvantageous situation. Coach Jeon expected a miracle and it happened just like he wanted.

Krik

Choi Yeon Hyuk grit his teeth. As soon as he grabbed the ball, he threw it up and hit it as hard as he could.

Pabang!

“15:0!”

“The lid is now open. What do I do now?”

Han Woo Jin set his mind on watching the ball. It was perfectly fine for the person using dirty tricks, but the person on the receiving end would get very frustrated. A person who played fairly like Choi Yeon Hyuk was bound to get even angrier. The anger of a top player like Choi Yeon Hyuk was nothing to laugh about.

‘But I can use your anger to my advantage.’

Choi Yeon Hyuk also didn’t have as much strength as before. Before he turned off his status window, Choi Yeon Hyuk only had half his HP left. It probably went down a considerable amount. ‘Even if I lose this game, he will lose a lot of stamina.’

After that game, the next game was different from the previous one.

Choi Yeon Hyuk did his best to serve, and Han Woo Jin was barely able to return those balls. Then Choi Yeon Hyuk would utilize his full strength to swing back and return them to win the point. Han Woo Jin had no intention of winning any points; he barely moved around and kept on hitting the ball all around the court, making Choi Yeon Hyuk run around. You could see his strength diminishing.

“Game, Choi Yeon Hyuk! 3-3! Han Woo Jin serve!”

Choi Yeon Hyuk played this game not to win, but to vent his anger. So his breaths were very labored. After the game ended, he realized he was not in optimal condition.

‘Was this your plan? You’re too much to me!’

‘It’s too late for you now. That’s why dirty play is called playing in quicksand.’

Han Woo Jin smirked. He didn’t care about the fatigue his body was experiencing because he was excited about seeing the ugly expression on the genius opponent’s face and the fact that he was the cause of it. This proved that his past ten years weren’t in

vain.

‘I think this set will be my limit.’

Han Woo Jin already expected the end of the match. He probably couldn’t last through the entire last set. He wanted to at least win the second set before his fire burned out.

He threw up the ball.

Sparrow.

Pabang!

‘You didn’t expect that?’

Han Woo Jin, who kept on using body shots and drop shots after his serve, suddenly used Sparrow, so of course his response was delayed.

Sparrow couldn’t be received if he wasn’t prepared. Not even Choi Yeon Hyuk could do it. Even if he was prepared for Sparrow and returned it, he would immediately receive a body shot. Choi Yeon Hyuk couldn’t return it as he still wasn’t used to body shots.

However, there were always unexpected variables that could occur.

Choi Yeon Hyuk received the serve, and Han Woo Jin immediately got ready to use a body shot. It was at that moment.

Puk!

“Euk!”

“...uh?”

The ball hit Choi Yeon Hyuk’s chest and rolled on the court. His body was out of strength, so the body shot had no power and it didn’t hurt at all. Han Woo Jin stared at Choi Yeon Hyuk with a face of disbelief and Choi Yeon Hyuk smirked at him with a face that showed that he was no longer afraid.

‘I’m going crazy. He’s not the type to be that reckless.’

Han Woo Jin knew that, but now the body shots had no effect on him and the situation had reversed once again.

Choi Yeon Hyuk wanted to get rid of his fear of body shots, and that's why he purposely got hit. It wouldn't work after just one time, but after getting hit multiple times, his body would get used to it.

If that happened, he would have the advantage again.

The ball went over the net again, and the two players once again moved with all their might. The two were now on equal grounds.

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“40:30! Han Woo Jin, set point!”

The game was 5-5. They were playing to the death and it was finally deuce. However, there were no deuces in the test league. If Han Woo Jin won this last point, then he would win the set and they would move on to the third set.

It was Han Woo Jin's turn to serve.

‘Shall we see it?...’

It was his last stand, so he turned the status window back on. He looked down at his racket and saw his status.

[Han Woo Jin] [Exhausted]

Strength 50 (-15) / Stamina 48 (-15) / Agility 42 (-15)

HP 220/1920 SP 50/440

Forehand: 9/20

Backhand: 4/20

Serve: 11/20

Volley: 6/20

Smash: 8/20

Drop shot: 4/20

Lob: 2/20

Special skill: Sparrow (serve)

Two levels in drop shot and one level in volley. He was able to raise the levels of these two skills by using the body shot strategy.

‘Exhaustion... no wonder I have no strength.’

His power greatly went down. Han Woo Jin realized why he couldn’t move his body as well as he wanted to. Though he had the will to play, he couldn’t play at all. He might have to lay down in the hospital after this match.

He had 50 SP. He could use Sparrow a couple times with this SP.

‘Sparrow? Or just serve?’

Although Choi Yeon Hyuk could receive Sparrow, it was just a normal return and not an attack. He was also now used to body shots, so if he used regular serves, he could get return aced.

Han Woo Jin chose to use Sparrow. His SP went down close to zero and he threw up the ball.

It didn’t matter how much SP or stamina he had left — Sparrow was still powerful.

Pang!

Choi Yeon Hyuk barely hit Sparrow which was almost traveling at a 90-degree angle and the ball flew up towards the sky. The ball returned to the baseline near Han Woo Jin and flew over his head.

Smash. He didn’t have any strength left, so he stood tall and hit the ball. His goal was Choi Yeon Hyuk’s body that had come up to the net. Choi Yeon Hyuk also didn’t have any strength left, so nobody expected him to receive the body shot.

Of course, Choi Yeon Hyuk scrunched his face when he saw the arc in which the ball was flying at towards him.

The ball was hard for him to hit. If he moved his body, the ball would probably be out. He didn't have time to dodge, and if he tried to dodge, the ball would hit his body he would lose the point.

If he manages to dodge this, he would be spent.

'What do I do? How do I handle this ball?'

He stopped thinking.

Choi Yeon Hyuk wasn't thinking about anything and he subconsciously made a move that he couldn't understand himself as he was watching the ball.

With a vertical snap of his wrist, he hit the ball. It was a very strange return.

The weird return that he did made a 90-degree angle and just slid down into Han Woo Jin's side of the court. It was as weird as Sparrow. The viewers and Coach Jeon couldn't help but watch in shock at what had happened.

Only Han Woo Jin saw it differently from the others. He was disappointed and frustrated at what he heard in his mind.

[You just witnessed the special skill, Slipper. You can now view Slipper on Choi Yeon Hyuk's status.]

'...A strange awakening in the middle of a crisis. Are you some sort of main character in a drama?'

Han Woo Jin really wanted to complain about this but he grabbed the ball to end the set.

The result of this last rally will decide the winner of the second set.

'I have to serve...'

Blinded by the ceiling lights, he threw up the ball.

The ball fell down.

Two meters.

Everybody was looking at the falling ball. The viewers, the players, and coach Jeon.

One meter and ninety centimeters.

The ball was way past the mark of where the racket should hit it. Choi Yeon Hyuk's muscles were very tense as he was prepared to receive the ball.

One meter and fifty centimeters.

Something was strange.

The viewers noticed why Han Woo Jin moved and the ball hit the ground.

*Tong... roll... *

“W-Woo Jin ah!”

Coach Jeon waved his hand in front of Han Woo Jin who was looking up, but Han Woo Jin's eyes didn't move at all. Coach Jeon was surprised and shouted at the players in the stands.

“H-hurry and call 119! And tell them to get an ambulance!”

Test league final match.

Choi Yeon Hyuk's victory.

Choi Yeon Hyuk watched his opponent being carried out on the stretcher.

After they were gone, Choi Yeon Hyuk just stood there and let down his arm that was holding the racket.

Chapter 6

Rival

“You have a sprain on your right wrist, and because you ran too much, both your leg muscles are in bad shape. You can’t practice or play any games for at least three weeks.”

Coach Jeon looked at the doctor’s note and told him this. There was an old man who was fondling his white beard. He was the owner of one of the five largest companies in Korea. He was the president of NK company.

“Hoho... he looks like a calm young man but surprisingly, I see him in a new light now.”

After watching the recording of Choi Yeon Hyuk and Han Woo Jin’s match, his smile hadn’t disappeared since watching the match. That was how satisfied the president was with their performance. This was the first time Coach Jeon had ever seen the President act like this, even though they have known each other for a long time.

While thinking about their rally with closed eyes, the president asked Coach Jeon a question.

“Coach Jeon, what do you think would have happened if Han Woo Jin started off with playing dirty?”

After hearing that question, Coach Jeon also thought about that possibility. In the sports world, it was useless to think about “what IF” for a game that had already ended. Yet people really loved these kinds of useless things.

What would have happened if Han Woo Jin started the game off with dirty play? What if he didn’t play fairly and used psychological warfare against Choi Yeon Hyuk? Coach Jeon tried to simulate what would have happened in his mind. As someone who wasn’t used to dirty play, Choi Yeon Hyuk probably would not have been able to easily adapt and he would lose his stamina and pace. On the contrary, Han Woo Jin would be able to maintain his body stamina and easily win two sets.

Han Woo Jin played the game to the death, and towards the middle of the game, Choi

Yeon Hyuk got fired up. If Han Woo Jin played dirtily in the beginning, he would have prevented Choi Yeon Hyuk from winning the first set.

Coach Jeon finished his calculations and opened his mouth.

“Seven out of ten times, Han Woo Jin would have won. Yeon Hyuk has never lost before, so I think he doesn’t have that much experience.”

Choi Yeon Hyuk was very excellent until now. That’s why he never lost a game, and he was never in the inferior position. He also didn’t know about his own weaknesses. That’s why Han Woo Jin’s body shots were so effective against him.

“Both of them are rookies but their styles are polar opposites. Choi Yeon Hyuk plays fairly and Han Woo Jin plays mind games. How exciting.”

The president laughed out loud and patted his beard. Coach Jeon also nodded his head at the president’s evaluation.

Two players who showed completely different playstyles like fire and water. As someone who has seen hundreds of tennis plays, Coach Jeon was also intrigued by their playstyles.

The president compared their styles and asked Coach Jeon, “What do you think? Choi Yeon Hyuk and Han Woo Jin, which one has more potential?”

The president asked Coach Jeon since he was the one taking care of the two players’ futures. Who would climb up higher and faster? It was asking him how much they could grow as players. Coach Jeon closed his eyes. He didn’t take long to think about it.

“Yeon Hyuk’s talent is the best in the country. I’ve never seen anyone with better talent than him.”

“Of course, that’s the case. I also thought that too.”

He was 186 cm tall and had sturdy muscles. He had great reflexes, power, and speed.

Choi Yeon Hyuk was a genius that was a mutation in a small country like Korea. If they were thinking about talent, he had world-level potential. The president and Coach Jeon thought like that.

“But... I don’t know about Woo Jin. I’ve never seen his kind of playstyle. I don’t know how far he can go and how he made it this far.”

I don’t know. That was the only evaluation that Coach Jeon could give after observing him. This was the exact evaluation for him. Although he had excellent eyes, he would never be able to decipher that Woo Jin had come back ten years to the past and that he also had a weird power.

The president also had excellent eyes and it was also impossible for him to evaluate Han Woo Jin’s talent. The president agreed with Coach Jeon’s statement and said, “Isn’t that why this is so much fun? It’s really weird for me to not know about these things at my age. Furthermore, you were the referee for that game.”

“Yes, President.”

The president’s eyes looked like he could read a person’s mind as he spoke.

“Between Choi Yeon Hyuk and Han Woo Jin, who were you rooting for?”

“...”

Coach Jeon couldn’t reply because the president already knew the answer to his question. Of course, Choi Yeon Hyuk was an excellent player. However, Han Woo Jin’s method of attacking someone else’s weakness and playing dirty depended on the person. Some people looked down on that playstyle.

However, if he were asked who made the viewers more fired up, the answer was easy.

“I chose Woo Jin.”

“Me too. That young man showed me such fierce play that it even made me forget my old age.”

He ran to death tenaciously even in a seemingly hopeless desperate situation. His insufficient talent and skills were made up by his stubbornness and effort. Dramatic would be the only word to define him.

The president clenched and unclenched his fist because he was still excited about that match. Finally, his voice calmed and he spoke to Coach Jeon.

“Anyway, first, you need to find a tournament for Choi Yeon Hyuk. Han Woo Jin needs to completely heal from his injury. Afterwards, you can get a schedule for him.”

“Yes, President.”

They showed that much potential during the test league. The president thought that they must win the Korean tournaments as he put his hands together.

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Han Woo Jin laughed while he thought about Coach Jeon’s scolding. Thinking about when he was getting yelled at, his body couldn’t help but shrink up. However, he didn’t apologize for what he did. Even if he was in the same situation again, Han Woo Jin would never give up.

‘I don’t have any excuses because I lost.’

There was no other word that made him feel more empty than “if”. Han Woo Jin shook his head to erase “if” in his mind. The second set even surprised him because of how well he played.

Han Woo Jin’s mind games that were based on dirty play was his strategy. Han Woo Jin was interested in fair play ever since he got the system so he always played fairly. However, that was the first thing that came back to his mind during his game with Choi Yeon Hyuk.

‘Yes.’

After the match with Choi Yeon Hyuk, he fainted while standing up and he opened his eyes on the hospital bed the next day. When he woke up, he was perplexed at his surroundings and the IV in his arm. He admitted that he didn’t manage his stamina that well but it was the first time that he fainted while standing.

Han Woo Jin would be discharged from the hospital after getting muscle therapy and treatment for his wrist for one week. He got an elastic bandage on his right wrist to prevent further infection.

He got massaged at the hospital and extra medication. When he got everything, it was already sunset. Han Woo Jin remembered his house password and opened the door.

pipik!

“I’m back.”

“Oppa you’re back?”

Han Yoo Ra was watching the TV while laying down and just nodded her head. Maybe his parents had gone outside. Han Woo Jin absentmindedly went into his room.

As soon as he opened his door, he noticed that his room was very clean even though he wasn’t living there. The floor was shiny. How much did his mom clean his room?

‘Mom...’

Han Woo Jin thought about his family and felt a tightness in his chest. He put down his bag and laid down on his bed. Many thoughts went through his brain. The second set was when he was limited by his stamina. Choi Yeon Hyuk, tennis, the system... He tried to rest but he had a headache.

He tried to sleep but he heard their front door opening. He figured that his parents had arrived.

“Woo Jin, are you here?”

“Yes, I just got back.”

His dad saw his arm and wrist wrapped in bandages. His mother gently touched his wrist. He had almost forgotten about this warmth. His dad looked at Han Woo Jin with worry in his eyes and Han Woo Jin asked him, “Dad, do you wanna go out to eat grilled eel later?”

His parents were surprised by his expression. Seeing his parents surprise, Han Woo Jin just smiled awkwardly.

The NK company second place prize was 300,000 won.

It was his first paycheck as a tennis player ever since he had come back from ten years in the future.

“Two servings of grilled eel please!”

“Yes! It’ll be right out!”

The ahjumma that owned the food stand went inside and brought back out the menu. Han Woo Jin’s father sat down on the chair while looking at the menu and opened his mouth.

“Is your wrist okay?”

To a person that was not a part of the family, it may have sounded like his father was speaking coldly but Han Woo Jin knew that his father was asking out of concern for him and he couldn’t help but feel warm inside. He laughed and waved his wrist a couple times.

“I just can’t play tennis for a while. It doesn’t hurt. You don’t have to worry about it.”

Truthfully, there was still a little bit of pain, but he knew that it would go away with time. Even though Han Dong Hoon was his father, he couldn’t let him know that he was hurting. His father nodded his head and poured water into his cup to drink it.

The two people waited for their meal, and two plates of eel were placed in front of them. The owner gave them a lot of side dishes so the table looked really full.

“We shouldn’t start with alcohol right?”

“Yes, I can’t drink for a while.”

Whenever someone gets injured, they should stay away from drinking and smoking. Han Woo Jin shook his hands while talking and his father looked disappointed that he couldn’t drink with his son. He only ordered one bottle of soju. All fathers in this world always looked forward to the day that they could drink with their sons.

Han Woo Jin already knew what his father was thinking about. After he was completely healed, he planned to win the next tournament, and when they go out to eat again, he’ll drink a bunch with his father.

Shiiik

They put the eel on the pan and heard the sizzling sound of meat roasting. His father, Han Dong Hoon, didn’t let him roast the eel because of his wrist injury. So he cooked the eel and other fish well.

“You can’t use the tongs because your wrist is injured. Just be thankful and eat.”

“Yes.”

His tone sounded angry but his words were very warm as he was worried about his son’s body. Han Woo Jin held his chopsticks instead of the tongs that were slowly changing in color.

As soon as the eel was roasted, the two began eating without speaking. Half of the eel disappeared from the pan quickly and his father Han Dong Hoon drank half of the soju bottle before speaking to him.

“Woo Jin ah, I, your father, regret that I made you play tennis.”

“Yes?”

Han Woo Jin’s eyes widened. Not only his eyes, but even his mouth was wide open in surprise. Han Dong Hoon continued speaking.

“Your mother and I went to watch tennis players during our honeymoon. If we had a baby we thought that we had to raise him as a tennis player.”

Han Woo Jin knew about this much. His parents played tennis every week and whenever the four major tournaments were on air, they ordered chicken and watched the tennis games. If a stranger was watching, they would think they were watching the world cup.

Yet Han Woo Jin never heard his father say this, not even during his past ten years of life.

“It was when you were in middle school. We enrolled you in Chung Woo Middle School that was really famous for their tennis team.”

“Yes.”

Han Woo Jin couldn’t remember that well but just nodded his head. He didn’t remember how he did during middle school at all. In short, the tennis he played during that time had no impact on him.

“Do you remember that you joined a tennis club?”

“...a little.”

Mentioning that, Han Woo Jin was able to remember bits and pieces.

Chung Woo Middle School.

It was a school that was famous for its junior tennis team. His parents that wanted a bright future for their child enrolled him there, and then as soon as he got accepted, he registered for the tennis club.

“But the coach who was taking care of the tennis club never let you play a game. I had to personally go talk to him.”

“...”

It was a story that he didn’t know about. Han Woo Jin was young at the time so he just picked up the ball and practiced swinging his racket. That’s what he thought was normal back then. He thought that if the coach didn’t let him go to the tournament, he thought he couldn’t go.

“There is no talent. That’s what he said. Words are cheap right? He said that so easily and that crushed me.”

“Dad.”

Han Woo Jin wanted him to stop.

Han Woo Jin looked at his father’s face and imagined how much pain he went through. He wanted him to stop talking, but his father shook his head and kept going. He might have been a little drunk so he was a bit more emotional than usual.

“So I held your hand and we just left the tennis club right away because I didn’t want you to be with a coach who discriminated and talked about talent.”

Han Dong Hoon’s depressed voice made Han Woo Jin’s chest hurt. He remembered a little bit about that time.

He followed his father while holding his hand, leaving the small middle school. He couldn’t speak to his friends from middle school that much.

“I took you to many different tennis clubs. If you even said one word about hating it, I probably would have stopped.”

Unfortunately, Han Woo Jin really liked tennis. His parents influenced him to like tennis. They didn’t force him to play tennis — it was he himself that forced himself to play.

His parents were sad to hear that their son didn’t have talent, but their son didn’t give up and grabbed the racket. That’s why his parents couldn’t give up on their son.

He couldn’t remember his life having that much ups and downs. Han Woo Jin was so surprised and sad that he couldn’t pick up his chopsticks and silently stared at nothing. His father picked up the eel that was already half-burnt and put it on his son’s plate.

“But look, my son got second place among the pros! You beat the people who thought that you weren’t good enough.”

“Father I’m...”

His throat choked up. He couldn’t finish what he was about to say. Han Woo Jin tried to hide his tears and just drank his water.

He didn’t know how many hardships his parents went through for him.

He thought about his parents who suffered from his lack of talent for those ten years that he continuously lost. Han Woo Jin couldn’t taste the eel in his mouth while he was chewing.

The weight of his father’s words was too huge and there were so many things he didn’t know about.

He couldn’t concentrate on the food’s taste.

“How can I call myself a parent when I didn’t believe in you? Haha...”

“Don’t say that...”

Han Woo Jin stopped him as he was insulting himself. His parents would never know about those ten years. He never heard a single bad word from his parents for ten years.

Lose, lose, and keep on losing. He couldn't earn money and they never cursed him. Instead, they only complimented him.

His father didn't open his mouth again after seeing his son's emotional state as he was holding his hand without saying anything. Seeing that his son was now all grown up, he couldn't help but feel happy and disappointed at the same time.

The father and son let go of their hands and finished up the eel.

Han Woo Jin ate the eel without tasting anything but he engraved this moment in his mind.

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"I'll just walk around before going back."

Han Woo Jin was really full and wanted to walk around the neighborhood. Han Dong Hoon looked at his son worriedly and answered, "You're injured, so don't go too far. If you're going to be late, call me."

"Yeah, don't worry."

Han Woo Jin lightly laughed at his father's worrisome nagging. He put his right hand in his pocket and began walking. March had passed and April was already coming up, but it was still cold.

Today was a very eventful day for him. He earned many things for his racket. Han Woo Jin was thinking about his racket that disappeared and clenched and unclenched his hand. He asked his parents about the Ivan Lendl signed racket, but they had no memory of it. He thought that the racket's 'memory' was gone forever in this world.

"How did this happen..."

His breath exhaled into white steam. He couldn't feel the pain in his wrist because of the cold night air.

He kept on walking and sat down on a bench, then his phone suddenly started ringing in his pocket.

*RRRRRR... *

“Who is this?”

He thought it was from home, but it hadn’t even been 30 minutes since he had parted with his father. Even though Han Woo Jin was injured, his father wouldn’t call him to nag some more. He tilted his head when he saw the unfamiliar phone number that appeared on his phone.

Anyway, Han Woo Jin decided to answer the phone.

“Hello.”

<< Is this Woo Jin?>>

The voice sounded familiar yet unfamiliar. He’d never heard this voice through a cell phone. He concentrated on the voice and guessed a name.

“Choi Yeon Hyuk?”

<<Yeah it’s me. I was told that you got discharged from the hospital. Are you free right now?>>

‘Free?’

Han Woo Jin thought about it for a moment. It was 9:38 PM. If he met up with Choi Yeon Hyuk right now, he would get home past midnight. He wouldn’t be drinking alcohol anyway, so he thought it was fine to meet him.

“I don’t care. We won’t be drinking alcohol right?”

<<Do I look like the kind of guy that would force someone who just got discharged from the hospital to drink alcohol? Let’s talk while getting some chicken.>>

He just ate eel, but he still had some room left in his stomach. Han Woo Jin replied, knowing that he could still eat chicken.

“Where do you want to meet?”

<<Sadang station. If you come, I’ll find you.>>

“Alright, see you later.”

Piik

Sadang station. He could arrive there in one hour if he took the subway. Han Woo Jin began walking to the nearest subway station and wondered what Choi Yeon Hyuk wanted to talk about.

Anyway, he'll know when he gets there.

[We will soon arrive at Sadang station.]

'I'm almost there.'

Ssangmun station was pretty far from Sadang station. It took one hour to get there, and Han Woo Jin was sitting on the cold seat for almost an hour. It was 10 PM, so the subway was pretty empty.

He walked up the stairs, passed the exit, and called Choi Yeon Hyuk.

<<RRR... Oh, did you get here?>>

"Just now. Where are you?"

<<Come to the fourth entrance. I'll wait for you there.>>

"Okay."

Han Woo Jin mumbled the number Choi Yeon Hyuk told him. There were a lot of people in the station even though it was late. There were many restaurants and bars near Sadang station, so it was common to see drunk people walking around.

As soon as Han Woo Jin exited the fourth entrance, a tough hand touched his shoulder. When he turned his head, he saw Choi Yeon Hyuk who was wearing a different outfit.

An oversized t-shirt and jeans. He had worn them for a long time. The ends of his shirt and jeans were frayed and worn out. This shattered the prince-like rich boy image that he had of Choi Yeon Hyuk. Choi Yeon Hyuk spoke as he saw that Han Woo Jin looked really surprised to see him.

"What are you looking at?"

“Aren’t you cold?”

Han Woo Jin said something other than what he was thinking. You couldn’t say it was spring now because it was really cold. It wasn’t at a temperature where you could just walk around in with a shirt and jeans. Then Choi Yeon Hyuk pointed at a bar that was located behind them.

“I left my jacket in the bar. Do you think I would walk around like this?”

“Then let’s go inside.”

The two people walked into the beer house to escape from the cold weather. There was a table that had a jacket on one chair in the corner. Choi Yeon Hyuk walked over and sat down.

“One fried and one flavored is that okay?”

“I’m good with anything except grilled.”

“That’s good. I’m ready to order!”

Choi Yeon Hyuk raised his head and called the employee. Han Woo Jin moved his eyes with a complicated thought as he watched Choi Yeon Hyuk order chicken and soda.

‘I thought he was well-off.’

That’s the only thing he remembered about Choi Yeon Hyuk when he saw him on TV receiving all the glory. In the newspapers, television, and internet, nobody was interested in Choi Yeon Hyuk’s past. They only spoke about him placing second in the world league tournament. So they just wrote those types of stories to promote tennis.

He felt like everything he knew about Choi Yeon Hyuk was destroyed and he had new thoughts about him. Han Woo Jin felt awkward while they waited for the chicken and Choi Yeon Hyuk began talking.

“Woo Jin ah, how many times did you lose until now?”

“What?”

He asked him what he was talking about but Choi Yeon Hyuk’s face made him seem

like he was really serious.

Choi Yeon Hyuk thought Han Woo Jin didn't understand so he asked him again.

“Tennis. How many times have you lost up until now?”

“...I've never counted.”

‘I can't count how many times I've lost.’

Not even counting his past ten years of life, his losses outnumbered his wins even in the present. He had always lost, so he hardly even remembered winning. Choi Yeon Hyuk just opened his mouth regardless of knowing whether or not Han Woo Jin was feeling depressed.

“Really? You too?”

“What?”

Han Woo Jin looked at him with a face that said, “What the fuck are you talking about?” Choi Yeon Hyuk misunderstood Han Woo Jin's expression and kept talking.

“If I'm strong, I win, and if the opponent is stronger, I lose. I thought that was definite.”

His thoughts were completely different from Han Woo Jin's. No matter how many times he was told that he would never win, he wouldn't give up. However, Choi Yeon Hyuk thought that what he was thinking was right.

“When I lost, I didn't care about it that much. I thought that if I practiced a little bit, then I could win. If I lose now, I can come back later. That's what has happened so far.”

Choi Yeon Hyuk, who had a poor background, had a talent that others didn't have. He had the talent to overcome those kids who received special education. The skills that he was inferior in, he could just practice and get better. His body was also improving as he got older. Now that he was an adult, he couldn't find a worthy opponent in Korea.

It was natural for him to keep on improving and it was also natural for him to look down on those below him. Han Woo Jin thought that Choi Yeon Hyuk was that kind of person. It was just in his nature, and he didn't have any evil intentions. That was how he had been living, so it was natural for him.

“I can beat the opponent that beat me today in the future. If there is an opponent that I cannot beat, then I thought that would be my limit. That’s how I’ve been thinking until now.”

Han Woo Jin suddenly thought that Choi Yeon Hyuk was no longer invincible. No, he felt like Choi Yeon Hyuk was becoming vulnerable. That’s what it looked like as he made eye contact with Choi Yeon Hyuk and it felt like they were on the same level.

“I almost lost to a person whom I thought was below me.”

“But you won in the end. Did you call me because you were angry that you lost a couple games to me?”

Han Woo Jin was angry because he assumed that was what he called him for. Han Woo Jin still lost that match in the end. Who wouldn’t be angry if his opponent who won kept on talking about the match?

But that wasn’t what Choi Yeon Hyuk wanted to talk about. Choi Yeon Hyuk stopped Han Woo Jin from speaking by putting up his hand.

“No. I figured it out because of you.”

“What?”

Choi Yeon Hyuk’s voice was soft compared to Han Woo Jin’s, who was starting to get angry. Choi Yeon Hyuk spoke without thinking compared to Han Woo Jin who looked like he was about to start a war. It had only been a week since the game, but Choi Yeon Hyuk’s mindset looked bigger than before.

“You don’t win because you are strong. You don’t lose because you are weak. Win or lose, it cannot be decided by a person’s stats.”

“...”

It was laughable.

Han Woo Jin learned the importance of stats because of his ten years of experience, but Choi Yeon Hyuk learned that skills were not that important after his match with Han Woo Jin. It was a huge difference in terms of thoughts.

They each saw each other's strengths, but they only saw the weakness within themselves. What did people call this type of relationship?

“So? Did you call to thank me? If that's all you're gonna say, I'm gonna leave.”

Han Woo Jin felt bad. Not because Choi Yeon Hyuk told him about his loss, but because of his loss, his opponent got stronger. Han Woo Jin's personality wasn't so good as to congratulate his opponent for receiving inspiration from him.

Han Woo Jin and Choi Yeon Hyuk's paths were different. If Han Woo Jin walked ten steps, Choi Yeon Hyuk only needed to walk one or two steps. Han Woo Jin was anxious because he helped push Choi Yeon Hyuk's back to make him better unintentionally.

“Set point 1-0. Game 5-5, 40:40. You remember up to that point right?”

“...Yes.”

He remembered until he threw up the last serve. Han Woo Jin's memory was blank after the green ball fell down.

Choi Yeon Hyuk picked up the water and drank it. He spoke in a sharp but soft voice.

“You couldn't hit the last serve.”

“Do you think I don't know that?”

“That's not what I want to say.”

“Then what is it?”

Choi Yeon Hyuk smiled at the look that Han Woo Jin was giving him. His smile looked like a prince who was saying, “Who cares about my appearance?”

Finally, he wagged his index finger at Han Woo Jin with an arrogant look.

“A serve that doesn't touch the racket doesn't count. That's why the score is still 40:40.”

Han Woo Jin finally understood what he was talking about. This was a declaration of war.

That day's match wasn't over yet. He hadn't won yet. That's what Choi Yeon Hyuk was saying.

'Okay, I'll accept your challenge.'

Han Woo Jin smiled and looked at Choi Yeon Hyuk's confident face. Originally, the smile was an expression of goodwill.

"Wouldn't it be better if you just accepted your win?"

"If I don't win convincingly, then it'll nag me."

They came to a mutual agreement.

In the middle of their conversation, two steaming hot servings of fried and flavored chicken were put before them. The two men reached out their hands at the same time.

Han Woo Jin decided that eating was more important right now.

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Coach Jeon was still up late at night typing on his computer. There was a list of tournaments on the monitor for his two players that he had to specially take care of.

Korea was uninterested in tennis tournaments. There never was an ATP league in Korea. [1] Famous players also never played in Korean tournaments. The leagues on the list were all upcoming tournaments and even included the Futures tournament.

"Even if the president uses his influence to get them special seeds, a lot of bad rumors about them not having skill might spread around."

However, if they started at the Futures tournament from the beginning, they would lose their stamina and be exhausted. Coach Jeon found one of the Futures tournaments that would be starting soon. [2]

[Daegu Open]

1. Name: 2006 Daegu Open Men's Futures Tennis
2. When: 2006.6.16-6.24

3. Place: Universe Yard Tennis court.
4. Reward: \$15,000
5. Sponsor: ITF, Korea tennis association

‘This is good...’

Coach Jeon decided for Choi Yeon Hyuk’s first Futures tournament to be the Daegu Open. He copied the website’s link and bookmarked it.

‘Han Woo Jin is injured and was currently resting, but he will soon return to full health. I need to find a tournament for him before then.

‘But I still have time.’

They had talent, but they didn’t have the experience, so Coach Jeon pulled his chair closer to his computer. Stamina training program, weight training schedule, diet... There were a lot of things to do.

The computer screen didn’t turn off until three hours later.

Translator’s Notes:

[1] ATP league – Association of Tennis Professionals

[2] Futures tournaments – Tournaments that allow players to increase their rankings and win titles.

Chapter 7

Competition Preparation

May.

People say spring arrives in March.

People say spring actually arrives in April.

The weather didn't start getting warmer until May. You could hear the sound of players playing on the court, the sound of feet hitting the ground, and balls getting hit.

Piik! Piik! Piiik!

"Why aren't you running faster!?! Lee Hyun Woo, Han Woo Jin! If you two don't pick up your pace I'm going to add ten more laps!"

"Yes, Coach!"

The players were running ahead as fast as they could. They were being forced to exhaust their stamina and they couldn't cheat their way out of it in front of Coach Jeon.

The tennis court was actually really big and you could go from one end to the other with four or five large strides.

Also, Han Woo Jin who started weight training couldn't help but drag his feet along with Lee Hyun Woo and was yelled at by the coach.

"Hoo...! Hoo...!"

'Physical strength is closely related to mental strength. I'm not talking about endurance. I'm talking about how much pain you can endure, which becomes your physical strength.'

Han Woo Jin gasped for air, but he didn't stop running. He kept forcing his legs to move.

At that moment, Lee Hyun Woo tripped.

“Ugh!”

Lee Hyun Woo lost his balance and fell down shoulder first onto the court and as Han Woo Jin saw that, he put out his hand.

“Hyun Woo hyung, are you alright?”

“Mm... my ankle kind of hurts.”

Lee Hyun Woo got up with Han Woo Jin’s help and started limping on his right leg. Due to his lack of balance, it looked like all of his weight was pressing down on his right ankle. Coach Jeon hurried over after he saw that two of his players had stopped running.

“Lee Hyun Woo, Han Woo Jin! What’s wrong?!”

“Coach, it looks like Hyun Woo hyung hurt his ankle.”

“What? Take off your shoe and sock.”

Listening to Coach Jeon, Lee Hyun Woo took off his shoe and frowned. It seemed like it was painful for him to just take off his shoe. Followed by taking off his sock, they saw a bright, swollen red ankle. It didn’t look like something simple to take care of as it looked like a serious injury.

“Han Woo Jin, take him to the infirmary room. After that, just keep on following your schedule as usual.”

“Yes, sir.”

Coach Jeon Sang Shik concisely instructed him on what to do and went back to observing the players as Han Woo Jin put Lee Hyun Woo’s arm over his shoulder. They slowly walked to the infirmary.

“I’m sorry Woo Jin. I’m making you waste your time like this.”

“Don’t worry about it. I have to go back to weight training now anyways...”

Now Han Woo Jin had a more painful expression on his face than Lee Hyun Woo. After Han Woo Jin returned from his break to recover from his injury, Coach Jeon immediately handed him a new schedule to follow. The schedules were beginning to leave a profound mental trauma on him. He felt like he was getting a better understanding of the responsibility of a pro.

“Haha, that’s because the coach has high expectations of you. His face is a lot better than it was the past. Just do your best.”

“Yes hyung, take care of your body also.”

The two parted ways as they reached the infirmary. Han Woo Jin took out his daily schedule that he always kept in his pocket.

2006.5.12

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17:00 Weight training

18:30 Fourth meal (Meal plan)

20:30 Practice

22:00 Fifth meal (Meal plan)

23:30 Bedtime

“It’s so packed.”

He sighed as he looked at his schedule. As the day progressed, Han Woo Jin felt like there was always something more to do and the things he previously did were negligible.

This kind of schedule was probably only given to high school or middle school students during summer break. Study for six to eight hours a day, a thirty-minute break, one hour of exercise... This plan was only possible in theory. The person who made this schedule should have known that it was impossible to consistently do it every single day.

The schedule was ridiculous as it was planned on a minute by minute basis. It dictated his training time, resting time, eating time, and even when he goes to sleep.

Even the team dietitian that thoroughly managed an athlete's diet by the gram was a part of the training process and worked together with the personal trainer. All famous athletes received this kind of treatment, but for Han Woo Jin who was experiencing this for the first time, this was hell.

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“I-I’m gonna die...”

In the mornings, squats – leg raises – lunges, and in the afternoon, there was cable training which made Han Woo Jin exhausted.

With his trembling hands, Han Woo Jin took out the piece of paper from his pocket.

“Next on the schedule... I’m eating again?!... I am kind of hungry.”

How much energy did he use that his stomach which was full four hours earlier was now empty? He didn’t eat that much food but his body needed more food because of the physical exhaustion. Han Woo Jin didn’t know too much, but the intervals during his meal times were very effective.

His meal times were split up every three to four hours and he had five to six meals a day. His meals had the perfect amount for him to consume. And if he ate too frequently, his metabolism wouldn’t be able to keep up. There were also no cases of him consuming a surplus of calories. And because he ate frequent meals, his body was able to absorb the food better.

Han Woo Jin dragged his legs to the cafeteria like a zombie.

He tried to move his legs as best he could and showed his meal plan to the chef. The chef looked at him with pity.

“Thank you...”

“Watch your body. You just got released from the hospital. Why are you pushing yourself so hard?”

“Ha ha...”

He couldn't think of anything to say back to him. Han Woo Jin just smiled, received the food tray, and went to his seat. It was also time for the other players' meals so the cafeteria was full of people. Han Woo Jin, who only wanted to eat his meal, walked over to the window.

However, somebody called his name.

“Woo Jin!”

“...Hyun Woo hyung, is your leg okay?”

Lee Hyun Woo had bandages on his leg as he waved at him. Han Woo Jin stopped walking towards the window and walked over to him.

“I was told that my ligaments were torn. I need to let it rest for one month. I don't think I can play in a tournament this year.”

“Hyung...”

“It's okay, I'll just play and take it easy. I'm just telling you this because you probably won't see me for a while.”

Lee Hyun Woo said it casually, but he was actually frustrated on the inside. A player who rests for a long period of time can seriously impact their career, especially in tennis.

Players usually needed workout three times longer than their resting periods to get back into shape. For example, if they rested for one month, they needed to practice every day for three months to return to their best condition. Han Woo Jin also had a three-week break and he was currently training.

“Woo Jin, when is your first tournament? I can go watch it.”

“Mm... I don't think it'll be the Daegu Open for me because my training schedule keeps on going past that date.”

As soon as Han Woo Jin recovered from his injury and returned to the team, he received a thick stack of documents from Coach Jeon.

Han Woo Jin had roughly read through the papers and felt sweat on his back. This wasn't a training plan for a tennis player. It looked like it was for a new company startup.

His schedule went from the beginning of May to the end of June. That meant that Han Woo Jin didn't have any time to play in the Daegu Open on June 16th.

"Mm... are you going to play in the Andong Futures? I remember that it starts on July 11 and lasts till the 26th."

"I think so... but I don't know. I play in whatever Coach Jeon decides on."

Han Woo Jin and Choi Yeon Hyuk were receiving special treatment. Every NK company player knew that. In the beginning, people really hated them and there were a lot of complaints. However, as soon as the people saw Han Woo Jin's clothes and exhausted face every day, they soon became quiet.

Also, the tournaments that the two players were going to compete in were completely decided by Coach Jeon. Since all the expenses for the tournaments were paid for by NK company, it was obvious for him to plan everything out for them. Yet on the other hand, this plan made it so that the two players didn't have any freedom.

"I heard Yeon Hyuk will be competing in the Daegu Open this time. They probably don't want you two to go against each other."

"...Yeah, I guess so."

It was possible that if they both entered the same tournament, neither of them would be able to get second place. That's why they put those two players in different tournaments at the same time.

Han Woo Jin chewed the chicken breast and closed his eyes. Choi Yeon Hyuk. They never met each other since that day. Their schedules were so busy that only sometimes passed by each other. Since the number of times they met was so little, they got fired up every time they saw each other.

'Is that what that punk is feeling also?'

The perfect weight training and meal plan gradually changed Han Woo Jin's body. His current stats improved by over 20 points. He never imagined this kind of improvement

on his body stats would only take two months.

He had been waiting. If they go against each other again, he had the confidence that he wouldn't be so miserable like last time.

His molars chewed down the chicken breast. Han Woo Jin's status appeared on the screen. Ever since his match with Choi Yeon Hyuk, he found out that he didn't need his racket to see his stats.

[Han Woo Jin]

Strength 56 / Stamina 58 / Agility 48

HP 1305/2320 SP 530/530

Forehand: 9/20

Backhand: 7/20

Serve: 12/20

Volley: 7/20

Smash: 9/20

Drop shot: 5/20

Lob: 4/20

Special skill: Sparrow (serve)

Han Woo Jin tightly gripped his spoon as he looked at his status.

Gulp.

He placed his spoon on the table. The spoon that Han Woo Jin was gripping before was slightly bent in the areas where he had placed his thumb and index finger. Sports that require swinging a racket also require a strong grip strength. It was one of the basics and held huge importance for the sport.

‘My body is ready.’

It was time to prepare for the tournament.

“Woo Jin, I chose your first tournament to be Andong Futures.”

Coach Jeon said this to him in a soft voice. His voice sounded like he was informing him of what he was going to eat tomorrow for breakfast. However, the words were like a shock of lightning to Han Woo Jin. Finally, he could enter a tournament. A player’s life was all about tournaments.

“Does it start on July 11th?”

“You start on the 20th.”

“What?”

Coach Jeon spoke expressionlessly to the clueless Han Woo Jin.

“The president submitted you as a wildcard. That’s why you’ll be entering without needing to go through the preliminaries.”

“Wildcard...”

He was very thankful. Han Woo Jin had never experienced being in a tournament with a seed and not having to go through the preliminaries. To get a seed, he needed to get a recommendation from a higher-up or he needed to have excellent experience — that was how much influence he needed. Han Woo Jin was a player who didn’t have either of the two mentioned above.

Yet he was able to receive a seed in his first tournament. Han Woo Jin tightly clenched both his fists, because he felt that this was how much the president believed in him.

“Andong Futures will be held at Seogwipo city. It’s really hot in July there and we don’t know what the weather will be like. You need to train in accordance to the weather.”

“Seogwipo? It’s called the Andong Futures, but why is it held in Jeju Island?”

“They’re only having the first couple preliminary matches there and the official tournament will be held in Andong.”

Seogwipo. This place was basically at the center of Jeju island. There were courts there for international games and consisted of seven hard courts and three clay courts. They did not know which court he would be playing on. Han Woo Jin was deep in thought.

Coach Jeon's voice brought him back.

"Your body is ready. But if you want to improve more, we need more time. Now, it's time to polish your skills."

"Yes."

Han Woo Jin nodded. Just like Coach Jeon said, his body was in its best condition, but although his body was in peak condition, it didn't mean that his skills were on par. He needed to practice his skills to bring them up to the same level as his body.

Han Woo Jin's body had received harsh training since April until the beginning of June, and his body hadn't changed that much since then.

His well-developed, lean muscles had extreme vascularity. When he checked his heart rate, his heart rate never went over 40 ever since his intense training. There were great improvements in his cardiovascular and pulmonary systems.

"Your body has improved more than I expected. Get rid of the rest of your schedule. From now on, we'll only focus on your skills. Alright?"

"Yes sir!"

Han Woo Jin's body's latent talent wasn't much, however, his body improved by leaps and bounds in such a short period of time because of the system's help.

[Your stamina increased by one because of your repeated intense training.]

[Your speed increased by one because you trained with alacrity.]

[Your lung capacity increased by one because of your aerobic training.]

Since he repeatedly burdened his muscles through intense weight training until he couldn't breathe, his stats went up.

In the beginning, he easily gained stats with just ten reps, but later on it became more

difficult as the number of repetitions increased to 100. He probably needed to do 1,000 reps to increase his stats now.

Although his training period was short, because of the intensity, he made great gains in the beginning. According to Coach Jeon's predictions, it would take Han Woo Jin to the middle of July to reach a suitable level for his body to partake in a tournament in August. On the contrary, Han Woo Jin had improved very quickly.

"Ah, there is someone you need to meet before you go to practice."

"Who is it?"

'A person I need to meet?'

Han Woo Jin never thought about that. During his training, the only people that he had to meet were the other players, Coach Jeon, and the president. He didn't really need to meet the other players either.

Of course, Coach Jeon persuaded Han Woo Jin to meet that person.

"You punk, do you think I have three bodies? Aside from the other players, I have to follow you and Yeon Hyuk everywhere?"

He realized that Choi Yeon Hyuk's first tournament, the Daegu Open, would be starting in a few short days. However, Han Woo Jin was curious about that because Coach Jeon never left the players and training with Han Woo Jin.

"The company will be assigning you a private agent so don't do the afternoon training and wait in your room."

"An agent?"

"Yeah, soon you will attend international games, so you need someone who can translate for you."

International tournament.

Just hearing it made his heart beat faster. Tennis players only decided to take part in international tournaments after determining if they had enough money to pay for the expenses or if a sponsor would be able to support them enough.

That's how expensive international tournaments were for tennis players.

Han Woo Jin only participated in international tournaments two times during his ten years. Also, his level of English was bad, so it was difficult for him to even apply for the tournament. Yet they were already discussing international tournaments which made him feel awkward talking about it so early in his career.

“Th-then when is he arriving?”

“Look at this trembling punk. Are you excited?”

“Yes.”

Coach Jeon laughed when he saw Han Woo Jin trembling in excitement. Coach Jeon thought that it was interesting to see this guy make this kind of expression.

“I was told your agent will arrive around 2 o'clock. So go to your room. I'll call you when your agent arrives.”

•••

“Hello, my name is Shin Sae Yeon who will be taking care of player Han Woo Jin.”

The person had cold, white skin and was dressed in a black suit, exposing a white shirt underneath. The person also had a crisp, clear, and unwavering voice.

That's the evaluation Han Woo Jin gave Shin Sae Yeon when he saw her for the first time. He thought she looked like a mannequin doll or a robot. He already felt repulsed by her because of her inhuman looks.

“I'm Han Woo Jin. Nice to meet you.”

He extended his hand and shook her hand. He was surprised by her cold touch. Fortunately, he didn't make any expressions.

Han Woo Jin and Shin Sae Yeon were expressionless, so when he stopped talking, Coach Jeon felt that it was awkward.

Since Coach Jeon was meeting the woman for the first time, he couldn't speak casually to her. So he whispered to Han Woo Jin, “Hey, is that all you're going to say? You need

to say something.”

“This is my first time so I don’t know what to say.”

They gave an agent to a player with no experience?

This was something that was never heard of from Han Woo Jin’s past life. This is only possible because NK company’s whole support, that was why he was able to get an agent. It was also Coach Jeon’s first time assigning an agent to an inexperienced player.

“...Are you not pleased with me?”

Shin Sae Yeon looked at the two people talking to each other and spoke to them with a cold voice. The two men stopped talking and looked at her because of her low voice.

“No, it’s just because this is my first time in this situation, so I don’t know what to do,” Han Woo Jin said straightforwardly.

‘If I make an excuse in this situation, it would make it worse. I need to speak frankly to be able to speak to her.’

“It’s also my first time being an exclusive agent for a player. Let’s take a look at the contract.”

“Yes, let’s do that.”

Shin Sae Yeon opened the envelope with her thin fingers and took out several files. She placed them on the table.

Whenever she bent over, he could see her hair drop and dangle. Han Woo Jin couldn’t help but bend back.

“You can listen to me speak while reading. First, I was hired by NK company, so I don’t require any form of payment from you. I will accompany you and take care of your schedule. Also, I will be in charge of the company card to handle your finances during the day.”

“Mm... in other words...”

“You are also Woo Jin’s coach?”

Coach Jeon interrupted their conversation and Han Woo Jin frowned, but Shin Sae Yeon didn't bat an eye and she answered in the same tone.

"It seems so."

Shin Sae Yeon's role was to be an agent and his coach.

In short, it meant that she would manage all tournament matters. She told them that she needed to take care of basically everything related to his career.

Han Woo Jin stared at the woman who might soon be with him throughout his tennis career. He examined her without any bias. Shin Sae Yeon also seemed to be used to this kind of observation. Or maybe her face was always like that, but she also she examined him.

Her fashionable clothes and makeup were finely done and her tidy hair made a good impression on Han Woo Jin. He also seemed to be fine with the contract in front of him along with the agent's talent.

'She's about my age... and she speaks four languages. She's really good!

Furthermore, she has a lot of licenses. If she has the experience, she can also help him earn more publicity than famous athletes in other sports.

Han Woo Jin decided to trust her. He got up from his seat and extended his hand over the table. The palm of his hands, which were very tough, touched her soft hands.

"Please take care of me, Ms. Shin Sae Yeon."

"Me too, Mr. Han Woo Jin."

Han Woo Jin shook her cold hand. For some reason, he had a strange feeling about this new relationship, but he immediately started thinking about the Andong Futures tournament.

The empty cafeteria was soon filled with the voices of these two young adults.

Chapter 8

Looking For Competition

The rain was drizzling. If you looked up at the sky, the clouds were so thick that sunlight couldn't pass through. It was still midday, but the world was completely gray.

‘This weather isn’t strange.’

That’s what Han Woo Jin thought.

As soon as he got off the plane, he felt the air was very humid. Within minutes, his shirt was sticky with sweat. It made him feel uncomfortable.

Han Woo Jin dragged his carrier bag in front of Shin Sae Yeon who was wearing a suit. Although the weather was humid, she didn’t even break a sweat.

Han Woo Jin couldn’t help but ask, “Ms. Sae Yeon, aren’t you hot?”

He already had sweat forming on his forehead but Shin Sae Yeon didn’t even fan her face with her hand. She turned her head and answered, “It’s a little hot. It already feels like summer here in Jeju island.”

The lowest temperature was 23 and the highest temperature was 27 degrees Celsius.

Even if it rained, the temperature wouldn’t go any lower. Just hearing the rain outside the window made him feel hot. Only Shin Sae Yeon’s soft voice was same as usual.

Shin Sae Yeon took out her cell phone from her suit and tapped it several times. She saw something and she passed it Han Woo Jin without a word. Then she walked out of the airport.

“Ms. Sae Yeon?”

“There is a car in the parking lot. Let’s go there.”

Shin Sae Yeon was very tall, and they were similar in height so it wasn’t difficult for

Han Woo Jin to catch up to her. The two briskly walked to the parking lot.

Waiting for them in the parking lot was a Volvo S40 model — a good, medium-sized foreign car.

“This is pretty good.”

Every male had some interest in cars. Han Woo Jin also thought that Coach Jeon’s car, the Benz, was very good. He was also interested in Volvos which had their own special characteristic of being sturdy.

Shin Sae Yeon didn’t seem to care about the car and got the key from the person waiting for them. Then she opened the door to the driver’s seat.

Han Woo Jin spoke in surprise as he didn’t expect for her to be the one driving.

“Are you going to drive?”

“Yes, I have a license.”

She looked at him as if she was asking if there was a problem. Han Woo Jin felt that what he was going to say was useless so he held it and sat in the back.

As soon as he sat down, she put the key in and abruptly turned the handle.

Kururung

‘Oh...’

Han Woo Jin was pleasantly surprised by her driving skills as she immediately exited from the parking spot. Shin Sae Yeon didn’t care about his feelings and immediately pressed down on the accelerator. The engine blared loudly and quickly exited the lot.

She drove like a professional male driver and Han Woo Jin realized that he shouldn’t judge a book by its cover.

2 PM, at a hotel near the Seogwipo tennis tournament. The two unpacked their bags and were resting.

After an hour, they ate lunch and Han Woo Jin’s body was in peak condition. Someone

knocked on the door.

“Mr. Woo Jin, it’s me.”

“Oh, wait a second.”

Han Woo Jin got up from his bed right away. He quickly opened the door and caught the scent of Shin Sae Yeon’s perfume which smelled like peppermint. He stepped back because he wasn’t used to her perfume. She misunderstood his gesture and took that as a signal to enter.

She went in with her bag and put it on the bed. Before he could say anything about her nonchalant attitude, she took out a piece of paper from her bag.

“This is the schedule for you before your tournament games. You should read it.”

“...It’s so packed.”

It was less than when he was in training, but it was not that different from his usual schedule. Han Woo Jin scanned the paper and stopped at the part about the afternoon practice game.

“Free training at the Seogwipo tennis courts?”

“Let’s talk about that.”

Shin Sae Yeon’s voice was always calm. People that didn’t know her would think she was cold, but people who listened to her voice would stay calm. Han Woo Jin looked at her eyes and concentrated on her words.

“The Andong Futures finals start on July 20th. The players arrive early and try to adapt to the environment. Right now, a lot of players have booked rooms near this area. It’s good to scout out your opponents before your matches.”

“So training in that area is good for scouting?”

“Yes.”

Shin Sae Yeon nodded her head after hearing him state the main point. She didn’t need to explain the rest and took out more papers from her bag. The stack of papers had

pictures on them.

“Here are the 22 players that will be competing in the tournament. Excluding you, are 21 players not including those who took part in the preliminaries.”

The tournament was mainly filled with those who had seeds and not as much from those who passed the preliminaries. In this Andong Futures tournament, only 10 out of the 32 people were from the preliminaries.

That meant that they could easily search up the profiles of those seeded players before the tournament. The papers in her hands contained the information of 21 players.

Han Woo Jin went through the papers one by one and suddenly stopped at one of the player's profiles. There was a name that he couldn't ignore.

‘Okuta Ryusuke... he entered this tournament?’

It was incredibly rare for an Asian to become a world ranked player in the tennis world. Han Woo Jin remembered that this man was in the top 30 in his previous life, which was not comparable to Choi Yeon Hyuk's fame and rank.

Okuta Ryusuke.

In his previous life, Choi Yeon Hyuk easily beat him in the Wimbledon during the top eight, but Okuta wasn't weak. At that time, Choi Yeon Hyuk was just too strong. However, Choi Yeon Hyuk was defeated by Federer in the finals.

In the pro world, whether you were good or bad depended on your opponent. The fact that Han Woo Jin still remembered Okuta meant that Han Woo Jin definitely had to scout him out during training.

“...Okuta Ryusuke?”

“Ah...”

Han Woo Jin's body suddenly turned stiff and Shin Sae Yeon continued to speak.

“His junior experience is very good and this is his third tournament since he became a pro... He doesn't seem to have any specialties... Are you worried about him?”

“...No, I just have a bad feeling.”

If he said that Okuta Ryusuke was one of the future top 30 ranked players, then she would think that he was crazy. That's why Han Woo Jin just said that he had a bad feeling.

“Feeling... anyway, I will check him out for you.”

However, Shin Sae Yeon didn't think lightly about what he said and was serious about it. She took out her notebook and wrote down Okuta's name.

‘Anyway, I can't rashly say things in front of her. This woman is too perfect.’

Han Woo Jin couldn't understand the reason for her excellence even though she was young. She was perfect and diligent. If she just had a little bit of talent, she would have many accomplishments.

Han Woo Jin was impressed by her impeccable business attitude and he developed a sense of alarm from her at the same time. If a person like her has even had a small clue about something, she would easily get to the end of it.

Of course, she would never reach the conclusion that he had time traveled because of common sense, but he could tell that she was incredibly intelligent.

“There's not that many details. Do you not have any recordings of them playing?”

“Yes. None of the players in this tournament are ranked. We don't have too much information about them because they don't have much popularity and fame from the people.”

If they were world ranked players, video clips of their plays would be on the internet. Then they would be able to watch them play and devise a plan on how to handle them.

Hence, there wasn't anyone that would analyze a playstyle for someone who wasn't famous. In regards to Futures tournaments in Korea, it was difficult to find talented tennis players who received attention from the public.

Then the only thing he could do was run into them.

“There's an indoor court in Seogwipo right?”

“Yes, there are three hard courts. Do you plan on going right now?”

Shin Sae Yeon got up from the bed and tilted her head. She gave him a look that seemed like she was asking if he really wanted to go out in this rain. Han Woo Jin nodded.

“Let’s go right now. Coach Jeon probably didn’t say anything about resting when we got here.”

“Hoo, yeah, you’re right.”

The two people laughed at the thought of Coach Jeon. Seeing her laugh for the first time, Han Woo Jin felt like he got a little bit closer to her. Until now, she interacted with him as if she was his agent and he was her player. That wasn’t bad, but they were humans so it would be best if they got closer to one another.

“I’ll get up first. I’ll meet you in the lobby in 15 minutes.”

“Sure.”

As soon as they made the decision, Shin Sae Yeon left the room and Han Woo Jin immediately changed into his sports gear.

He saw his racket in his backpack. He ignored the feeling of wanting to pick up his racket and closed his backpack.

It’s time to go.

“The building looks great.”

Han Woo Jin walked comfortably while holding his racket as he was wearing an easy to move in shirt and shorts.

Although it was raining outside, the air in the indoor courts was humid but the ground wasn’t slippery.

‘If it’s only this much, there should be no problems with my games.’

Inside the indoor courts, there were several people playing games and it looked like they were a part of the club. Only one of the three courts was empty.

Han Woo Jin thought that they had come at the right time after he saw the empty court.

“There’s an empty court but no opponent?”

The people who looked like club members were speaking to themselves and there was no one else inside the indoor courts. He might have to resort to practicing by himself.

Han Woo Jin saw someone enter.

“Someone’s here.”

The two turned their heads at the same time. Three people entered from the entrance and he couldn’t understand their conversation. It wasn’t that they were speaking too fast, it was a different language. This language was something that Korean men heard a lot on the internet.

“Japanese?”

Han Woo Jin mumbled and Shin Sae Yeon nodded her head.

The three people were quickly speaking to each other in Japanese. Two of them were holding rackets. Han Woo Jin and Shin Sae Yeon looked at one of the players and spoke to one another. It was the face that they saw earlier on the papers.

“Your luck is good.”

“...do you wanna try playing with him?”

Okuta Ryusuke.

What a coincidence. As soon as he checked into his hotel room, he met one of his potential opponents that was participating in the tournament. Compared to Han Woo Jin who looked ready and excited to play, Shin Sae Yeon looked nervous.

Han Woo Jin just unconsciously wanted to play against him. He simply wanted to have a practice match before the tournament.

“I’ll hide my special skills from him. I just want to test the waters.”

“If you say that... I’ll go ask him.”

Shin Sae Yeon nodded her head.

An agent's role was to assist their player. When the player really wanted to do something, if the agent refused, then it would not be a good career move for them. Also, she wanted to see how good Han Woo Jin was.

He was one of the two players who received a special contract from NK company. She already knew the skills of the other one.

The other player entered the Daegu Open and was currently in the top four. He never lost even a single set. He will probably be playing in the tournament in a few days, and definitely deserved the special contract from NK company.

‘What about Woo Jin ssi...?’

Shin Sae Yeon didn't see anything special about Han Woo Jin except for his harsh training. Even during practice games, his skills and talents were limited by Coach Jeon. That's why she had never seen his full potential.

It was obvious that an agent should know everything about their player. Shin Sae Yeon was curious about the full extent of Han Woo Jin's skills.

“[Excuse me, are you the player Okuta Ryusuke?]”

Okuta Ryusuke's face showed that he was very surprised by her voice. He opened his mouth and mumbled,

“[She's beautiful...]”

Okuta couldn't say anything because of her, so the person next to him spoke.

“[Who are you?]”

“[I am agent Shin Sae Yeon. Can you listen to my request?]”

Okuta didn't seem to care about what the two agents were talking about, he just blankly stared at Shin Sae Yeon. He was only 20 years old so he still acted immaturely whenever he saw pretty girls.

Shin Sae Yeon said something and it looked like they reached a decision. She walked

back to Han Woo Jin. She looked tired and she opened her mouth to speak.

“Hooo, they will only play if he can serve first. Player Okuta seems to be young so he is a bit childish.”

Han Woo Jin and Shin Sae Yeon were in their early twenties but Okuta was younger than them. If they took into account his actual birth date, then he wasn't even 20 yet.

However, Han Woo Jin's mental age was already over 30 years old and Shin Sae Yeon always had a poker face. So they thought that Okuta looked really young.

Han Woo Jin nodded his head.

“He probably won't be childish on the court. Thank you for your hard work.”

“It's my job. Just do your best.”

Do your best. This didn't mean that he had to do his best, but it meant that he should scout his opponent. It was absurd for him to do his best to win but also was not good for him to completely lose. It was important to create a balance between these two ideas.

Han Woo Jin grabbed his racket and walked to the court. He looked at Okuta Ryusuke that was across the net. Suddenly, he saw Okuta's information in his head.

[Okuta Ryusuke]

Strength 47 / Stamina 55 / Agility 53

HP 2025/2200 SP 530/530

Forehand: 13/20

Backhand: 2/20

Serve: 9/20

Volley: 6/20

Smash: 7/20

Drop Shot: 7/20

Lob: 9/20

Special Skill: ??? (Forehand)

‘Of course.’

He had an amazingly strong forehand but his backhand was extremely pathetic. Han Woo Jin already saw it. Okuta Ryusuke could not hit backhands. However, there was a reason why he was able to climb to become a world ranker.

Han Woo Jin wanted to find out if his current ‘style’ was the reason why he was able to become a world ranker or if he developed it later on. His clenched his fist harder as he wanted to find that out.

Okuta who was serving first, looked very childish as he looked at Han Woo Jin.

“[Shall we start?]”

He didn’t know what he was saying but he understood what he was saying. Han Woo Jin just nodded and Okuta threw up the ball with a serious expression.

Toong!

“Toong?”

Han Woo Jin blankly stared at the ball that was going straight toward his face. The ball flew over the net in a slow arc and bounced in front of him.

Puduk!

His molars and fingers made a cracking sound at the same time. He was angry that his opponent had no intention to play seriously. His hand suddenly gripped his racket in an intense manner. Han Woo Jin couldn’t find a reason to hold back his anger.

Okuta’s serve wasn’t weak, but he had no intention of playing seriously. That ball was from a player who didn’t care.

His muscles contracted and immediately flexed. It was a stroke that looked like he was

breaking something. He used his whole body and turned to use a full swing on a one-handed smash.

Pang!

The ball flew back at a speed that nobody could see.

The ball headed towards Okuta Ryusuke's direction; his face mirrored that of a blank idiot.

•••

He was 19 years old in Japanese age. Okuta had a good feeling.

As soon as he arrived in Korea, it was raining, and he was uncomfortable because of the humidity. However, it disappeared as soon as he met Shin Sae Yeon. He thought this was fate.

'I was told that Korean women are beautiful, it's true!'

When his friends talked about Korean girls, he didn't believe them, but now he did.

Instead of playing tennis, he wanted to ask her out to eat. If he didn't have his agent Sato who was famous for his strictness, he would have immediately asked her out.

Okuta was only thinking about Shin Sae Yeon and wasn't interested in the tanned man standing across the net. He was a little bit shorter than him. He looked a little handsome but he didn't take care of his skin, and so that was why he didn't pay attention to him.

However, he needed to at least show some manners?

Okuta was focused on Shin Sae Yeon who was watching the game and he spoke to the Korean player.

"[Alright, let's start.]"

His opponent seriously nodded his head. He thought he was a boring person and threw up the ball.

'Anyway, this is just a practice match. There's no need to go all out.'

That's what Okuta thought as he served. The slow ball went over the net.

Afterwards...

Pang!

The ball came back with amazing speed and passed Okuta's side.

The ball skimmed his ear and flew out of the court. It was a stroke that he didn't expect at all.

'That hurts...!'

If the ball's speed was 200 km/h or faster, even if the ball just barely passed by him, it would hurt. Okuta's ear was slightly swollen and red. He wanted to say something.

Yet he lost his voice when he saw his opponent.

Okuta stepped back unconsciously. He was perplexed and he looked scared. The opponent's face looked angry although he was the one that got hurt.

You know that feeling when your friend gets mad at you for joking?

That was what Okuta felt was happening right now. His messy serve unintentionally made his opponent mad.

Also, the ball that he returned? He thought that Han Woo Jin had hit the ball while aiming at his face on purpose. If the ball curved a little bit more it would have hit his face. If it were a direct hit, he might have broken his nose.

'Okay, let's play seriously.'

A man doesn't let others hit him without hitting back. If he was young, he was much more hot-blooded.

Now Okuta put strength into his grip. He was more fired up, both physically and mentally.

“...[I’m gonna be serious now.]”

His opponent probably didn’t hear him.

It wasn’t for his opponent but for himself. Although he was young, he was still a pro. He had such intense concentration that he could block out all thoughts that were not related to the game.

This time, he tossed the ball up with a serious face.

The score was 15:0.

Okuta Ryusuke started the second rally of the first game of the first set.

Okuta’s serve was fierce. His serve was fast and sharp, but it was nothing special in the world of pros. At that moment, Han Woo Jin’s body sprang forward like lightning.

Pang!

There was no room for anger. Han Woo Jin gracefully ran to the ball and received it.

A clean forehand slice.

At this moment, both players were serious. They could only see the ball, the court, and their bodies that were moving as efficiently as possible. Okuta took some big steps backward and returned the ball that landed very close to the line.

Tennis players who were close to pro level were able to precisely rally back and forth. As long as neither of them made a mistake, they could go on rallying for a long time. Furthermore, in this situation, they were both hiding their skills.

‘...Should I make the first move?’

Han Woo Jin broke the rhythm and attacked.

He arrived at the spot where the ordinary ball was going to land and he swung fiercely to the left side of the court. That spot was where he couldn’t hit the ball with his right forehand. It was his trick to force Okuta to use his backhand.

Since he intentionally changed directions, his speed was slower but that didn’t stop

the ball from flying off with incredible power.

As if he expected that, Okuta moved quickly.

Pang!

The ball that Okuta hit landed on Han Woo Jin's left side, but he was too far and wasn't able to reach it.

However, the rally that they just finished was within Han Woo Jin's expectations. Although the point went to Okuta, Han Woo Jin's face was calm.

"30:0!"

Agent Sato announced the score in English and surprisingly said it without an accent. Although Okuta scored the point, Sato looked at him with a displeased expression.

"To think that he already has to use it... just who is this player?"

Han Woo Jin paid no attention to Sato who was looking at him. Instead, he was staring at Okuta as he was now holding his racket with his left hand.

'He's using his left hand.

'Okuta is a switch striker, and he can use the racket adeptly with both hands.'

He could freely switch hands when he was playing. Okuta was ambidextrous and he could use both hands with his racket with equal skill. His body's balance was also almost at the same level.

His playstyle was one where he frequently switched hands while playing, and thus his body also changed playstyles along with his hands.

There was no need for him to use backhands. He just needed to simply move his racket to his other hand and he could use his forehand, which changed the way the court needed to be played. So the fact that he was bad at backhands was not a complete disadvantage for him.

The human body was biologically designed to be able to fold inwards, and that was why forehand strokes were stronger. They were also able to be played more skillfully

and were more detailed than backhands.

This skill is what made Okuta Ryusuke stand out from the others.

However, Han Woo Jin knew that Okuta still hadn't gone all out yet. Although he was a switch striker, if he could only use simple forehands, then he would never be able to take part in major tournaments. He needed something special.

Okuta once again tossed up the ball. This time, he was gripping the racket with his left hand.

'Switching allows the user to change the speed and direction of the ball, and it also causes a distracting and confusing effect on the opponent.'

Han Woo Jin had trained enough. He was no longer deceived by those shallow tricks as he patiently waited and watched the ball.

Okuta hit his serve with an appropriate speed. Since he was ambidextrous his whole life, he was easily able to control his strength in both arms. In other words, you could say that his arms weren't necessarily powerful.

That meant that either both his hands were powerful, both were weak, or both were normal.

That's why Okuta's serves weren't too difficult to receive.

'I've figured out the gist of it.'

Han Woo Jin already knew the speed, direction, and curve of his serve. It was like a telephone punch. Han Woo Jin immediately twisted his racket to return his serve.

kigik

The grip of his tennis racket made a small squeak because of his tight grip.

There are several ways to hit a ball in tennis.

A top-spin consists of swinging the racket upwards, and the drive is the ball's large curvature to the left or right side of the opponent's court.

However, if someone asked about the most powerful stroke, it would be the flat.

The flat is where you hit the ball completely straight with immense speed so that nobody can hit the ball if they can't read the ball's curve in advance.

Pang

The ball landed on the right side of Okuta's court, and it bounced on the ground without giving him the time to react. If he hit the ball diagonally while using a flat, then the ball will have enough spin for it to not go out.

“30:15!”

Han Woo Jin heard the score that Sato announced with a strange accent, and that made him confident in knowing his opponent's weakness.

‘There's a small time opening when he uses the switch. He doesn't have any spare time to receive strokes like rising and smash.’

Earlier, if his racket was in his right hand, then he would have had time to hit the ball. The small time window of when he was switching hands was the crucial moment that caused him to miss.

If that was the case, then he was positive that Okuta's style would be complete in the future when he was more mature.

Han Woo Jin was glad that he found a strong opponent before he reached maturity as he returned his serve.

“30:30!”

Okuta's agent, Sato Takeshi, had an expression that slowly grew ugly and uglier towards Okuta.

This Korean player was able to easily find his weakness with only two rallies. No one should have known about Okuta regarding his playstyle as he was not yet famous. If he really discovered his weakness with only two rallies, then...

‘He's too dangerous. Okuta is still lacking. To think that he entered this tournament to improve his skills but he's already met this monster.’

Okuta Ryusuke was a hidden card from the Japanese Tennis Association.

Switch striker, excellent senses, and at a young age.

Regarding all these things, it was enough for him to become a world ranker with these aspects. Within one year, he had the possibility of participating in the ATP tour.

Okuta should look to keep on improving, but if he lost in this no-name tournament, he could end up in a slump.

That's what Sato was worried about the most.

Okuta's face showed that he was beginning to get angry. His calm demeanor was getting hot and his breathing was getting rougher.

He was no longer calm.

'Okay, show me what you got.'

Han Woo Jin smirked. Taunting wasn't his specialty, but against a newbie like Okuta, it was simple. He lowered his racket and shrugged his shoulders.

That was enough.

"[How dare you...!]"

Okuta mumbled under his breath and changed his position. He gripped his racket with his left hand and brought it to the center of his body. He held it with both hands.

'...He's going all out already?!"

Han Woo Jin's expression turned serious as he suddenly felt the change in atmosphere. Okuta's current form got him into the world rankings.

Ambidextrous Okuta Ryusuke invented this style because he wasn't content with just being a switch striker.

Forehand double.

If this skill was perfected, then it would be easy for him to win this futures tournament.

However, Okuta was still inexperienced. Han Woo Jin gambled that his skill was still incomplete.

It was still Okuta's serve and he tossed the ball up. This time, he started with his right hand.

Pang!

The ball was filled with his angry emotions. The ball had a little bit of a shaky curve, but it was still faster than what he expected. Han Woo Jin corrected his prediction to where the ball would land and he quickly stepped two steps forward.

Before he returned the ball, he saw Okuta over the net. He felt like time was moving slowly because his concentration was at its peak. After Okuta served, he immediately moved up towards the net and gripped his racket with both hands.

If you wanted to describe it with a similar form, it looked like he was performing kendo.

It was a unique position as he was holding his racket on the thin side so that he could respond quickly on both sides. This was the forehand double that would become Okuta Ryusuke's signature move.

'Let's test it out.'

Okuta had served with his right hand earlier, so Han Woo Jin needed to hit it toward his left side to make him use his backhand.

Han Woo Jin hit the ball that bounced with a spin, aiming for Okuta's left side. It felt good in his hands. It was a perfect drive.

Tung!

As the ball was flying towards the sideline, Okuta's body immediately jumped to the left. Knees, hips, and shoulder. His entire body rotated to the left side, so Okuta immediately reached the ball and he hit the ball with his right forehand with both hands.

Pang!

The benefit of using both hands in a stroke was obvious. The ball was able to move a lot faster and with more power.

If you used both hands to hold your racket in other sports, it would always be more powerful than just using one hand. Have you ever seen a baseball player swing his bat with only one hand?

Of course, one didn't always use both hands. Nobody uses both hands in ping pong. However, it depends on the situation in tennis, so the player can sometimes use one hand or two hands. If one needs to hit the ball powerfully, one can use two hands. Yet if one needs to lightly hit the ball or use a spin, one can use a single hand.

The stroke that Okuta used just now was a flat without any spin to it, but the speed was amazing.

Pang!

“...30:40!”

‘Whew, it was out.’

Han Woo Jin let out a sigh of relief hearing Sato's expressionless voice as he realized that the ball was out. It was clearly showed that Okuta's double forehand was still incomplete. He couldn't control his strength well with both hands.

‘He could have used spin to make it in, but his freakishly fast speed in changing positions is frightening.’

If the ball went to his right side, his right hand would be on top, and his left hand would be on the bottom. Therefore, it was easy for him to receive the ball with full strength by simply changing his hand positions.

This was the future world ranker's, Okuta Ryusuke's, specialty.

Okuta clenched his teeth because he used his special skill but he still lost the point. As he was about to throw up the ball again, Sato stopped him by coming on to the court.

“[Wait!]”

“What?”

Han Woo Jin was confused as to what was going on. Okuta looked at his agent as he was confused as to why he stopped the game. As soon as Sato came onto the court, Shin Sae Yeon asked what he was doing.

“[Is there something wrong?]”

“[Okuta’s condition isn’t good. Let’s stop the practice match here.]”

Shin Sae Yeon stared at Okuta, and Okuta shook his head in denial. He showed her that he was lively, but Sato put his hand behind his back and pinched him hard. He opened his mouth to make a painful sound, but he stopped himself.

“?!”

“[I apologize, but let’s play another time.]”

“[Wait...]”

They left before Shin Sae Yeon could say something. Han Woo Jin understood the situation and put down his racket. The opponent’s agent thought that Han Woo Jin was too strong of an opponent.

“We’ll probably never meet them again before the tournament.”

That agent will never let Okuta meet him again.

The agent wasn’t stupid because he observed that Han Woo Jin was able to make Okuta go 100% before a single game even over. So in order to not leak any more information, he immediately stopped the game. However, his player didn’t seem to care.

Shin Sae Yeon shook her head after she saw the outcome of this match because she couldn’t figure anything out. They ended the game before she could observe Han Woo Jin’s skills.

‘A standard style. Overall high skill level. His shorter-than-average height shouldn’t be a problem.’

In Shin Sae Yeon’s opinion, Han Woo Jin looked like he could barely achieve a world ranking. He could probably place top three in Korea, but NK company’s president didn’t expect so little of him. He definitely had potential or something special that she

hadn't seen yet.

Han Woo Jin shook his racket while thinking about the game, and Shin Sae Yeon looked at his back that was on the court.

The two people were thinking to themselves without moving before he decided to have another game with the club members that arrived a few minutes later.

As he expected, Han Woo Jin never saw Okuta Ryusuke until the day of the tournament.

•••

July 20th. Han Woo Jin got up from his bed to complete his schedule. The sunshine that entered through the window poked his eyes.

The sky was very clear. Han Woo Jin looked outside through the window and he thought that they wouldn't play indoors today. He turned his eyes and looked at the desk.

He thoroughly cleaned his racket yesterday and it shined brightly with a blue light from the sun as it waited for its owner.

Han Woo Jin grabbed his racket.

[Han Woo Jin]

Strength 57 / Stamina 60 / Agility 50

HP 2400/2400 SP 550/550

Forehand: 9/20

Backhand: 8/20

Serve: 12/20

Smash: 10/20

Drop shot: 5/20

Lob: 4/20

Special Skill: Sparrow (Serve), ??? (Smash)

24 hours had passed, so his SP and HP recovered. His status showed that he was in peak condition.

His veins popped as he gripped his racket.

It was time to fight.

Chapter 9

Top 32 of the Tournament

Especially in Korea, tennis futures tournaments weren't popular. Therefore, there was nothing much to see.

The opening announcer's speech was irrelevant, and Shin Sae Yeon spoke to Han Woo Jin who was touching his racket frame.

"...Mr. Woo Jin, how is your body condition?"

"It's at its best. I'm ready to play."

You could hear the confidence in his voice.

There was a reason why he sounded so confident. Surprisingly, when he finished a practice game yesterday, his smash level went up by one and he earned a new special skill.

'It's still not available for me. I still need to fulfill one more condition to obtain this skill.'

If he didn't see that player's special skill, then he wouldn't have recognized it. Yet he didn't know why his skill was still blocked. However, he still couldn't be any happier because of the fact that he could have another weapon like Sparrow.

Furthermore, his body condition was great. He closed his eyes and concentrated and his senses. He could decipher the wind direction based on the breeze that brushed his skin. This meant that his mental and physical health were in peak condition.

"Mr. Woo Jin, you're in the second match."

In this Andong Futures, the first set of matches would take four days to complete. It was the top 32, so there were 16 matches lined up. There would be about 5 to 6 matches a day.

Also, Han Woo Jin's number was the second match on the first day. As soon as the announcer finished the opening, the first match would begin.

"I believe my match will start in about two hours. Ms. Sae Yeon, are you going to stay here?"

There was nowhere to hide from the harsh rays of the sun in the stands. This place would obviously be very hot for her who was wearing a suit while sitting down. Shin Sae Yeon took out a hand fan from her bag and began waving it.

It was the sign that showed that she was fine. Han Woo Jin stood up next to Shin Sae Yeon. The first match was almost over so he wanted to warm up his body.

[Now we will begin the Andong Futures Top 32! We will start the first match! All of the viewers...]

Han Woo Jin walked away from the announcer to start his warm up.

He was more excited than nervous the closer it was time for him to play. Han Woo Jin smiled as he gripped the racket with his trembling hand.

•••

'It's ending.'

Han Woo Jin watched the two players rally back and forth and it seemed like they were even.

The set point was 1-1. The person in the lead was a Korean player in his thirties. Thirty was considered to be old in tennis and he was drenched in sweat, but his serve was still very strong.

"Game, set and match, Kim Jin Hyun! Score 7-5, 4-6, 6-2!"

You could hear the crowd cheering from the stands. They shouldn't cheer for only one person. Since the players weren't world rankers and this tournament wasn't that big, the viewers were just watching them play.

However, player Kim Jin Hyun who won this game with difficulty deserved to be praised and encouraged.

“Thank you!”

With his back covered in sweat, he made a 90-degree bow to the audience and left the court. Han Woo Jin watched him pass by and thought about his next opponent.

‘Lee Yong Woon... average. Even according to Ms. Sae Yeon, he is mediocre. Can I take it easy?’

The tournament was long. There was no exact time schedule, and it depended on how long the players’ matches were.

The reason why players tried so hard to get a seed placement in the tournament was because if one started out from the preliminaries, the further one progressed, the more difficult it would get and the player would be physically and mentally exhausted by the time they reached the finals.

There were many cases of those who started in the preliminaries by going against a strong opponent, and by the middle of the tournament, they couldn’t even unleash half of their full strength. That was why players needed to carefully take care of their bodies and muscle exhaustion. That was also why being a pro in tennis didn’t just mean being able to hit the ball well.

“Player Lee Yong Woon and Player Han Woo Jin, please step onto the court.”

“Yes.”

A staff member came to the players’ area and called their names. Han Woo Jin gave a short answer and went up.

The staff cleaned and tidied up the court from the previous match that was covered with dirt and sweat. It looked like they were using hard courts in this tournament, so they cleaned the court perfectly. Due to the smooth texture of the ground on the hard courts, it was easy to clean.

As Han Woo Jin walked up to the court, a young player stood up. Han Woo Jin knew that he was Lee Yong Woon and he just expressionlessly looked at him.

[Lee Yong Woon]

Strength 47 / Stamina 50 / Agility 46

Forehand: 5/20

Backhand: 5/20

Serve: 7/20

Volley: 5/20

Smash: 8/20

Drop shot: 4/20

Lob: 3/20

Special Skill: None

‘This won’t be hard.’

Han Woo Jin checked Lee Yong Woon’s stats and gripped his racket. He saw that Lee Yong Woon’s level was about the same as an NK company player. Except for Choi Yeon Hyuk, he never got the feeling that he would lose to anyone.

[Alright! Now we will begin the second match for the top 32 of the Andong Futures Tournament!]

The announcer’s voice was very loud, probably because he was using speakerphone. Han Woo Jin expressed his annoyance at the loud voice, but he then quickly stepped onto the blue hard court. He thought that they must have painted it recently, because there weren’t any signs of wear and tear or dirt.

[In this match, Han Woo Jin from NK company and Lee Yong Woon from Daehan Life Insurance will be playing against each other! Everybody, please look forward to this match!]

Han Woo Jin rolled his ankles several times. He wanted to check the hardness of the ground. As soon as he stepped on the ground, he felt that he could easily bounce back up. He couldn’t tell exactly how much the ball would bounce exactly, but he knew it wouldn’t be that low.

Since the hard court's ground was very hard, the ball's speed would be fast and it would induce greater strain on his legs. Although that was the case, this was Han Woo Jin's favorite type of court.

'Because it's a hard court, I should be able to easily predict where the ball will bounce up.'

Han Woo Jin liked to play on hard courts because he was easily able to simulate the speed and bounce of the balls in his head. It was a little irregular on clay courts and it was possible for the speed to change. Additionally, on grass courts, you could not predict the speed and bounce of the ball.

As Han Woo Jin was checking out the court, he heard the announcer announce the beginning of the match.

[After we decide who will serve first we will immediately begin the match! Both players come forward!]

Han Woo Jin began to walk forward. It looked like they were going to decide who would serve first with a coin toss. The two players arrived at the middle of the court.

"Both of you, choose heads or tails."

"You can choose."

"...I choose heads."

So Han Woo Jin got tails and referee tossed up the coin. With a ping, the coin went up and landed on the referee's palm.

They saw a number. It was tails.

"I'll serve first."

"Okay."

[Han Woo Jin decided to serve first! Please get ready to start!]

Han Woo Jin received the balls and went back to the baseline.

Han Woo Jin saw the referee's head nod asking if they were ready, and he responded with a nod. It meant that he was ready.

“Players ready!”

The two players' bodies became nervous like a bow that was being pulled back. It was as if the ball was a bullet that would be shot to start a war.

Finally, they heard the referee's shout for the start of the match.

“Love all 0:0! Han Woo Jin serve! Play!”

Before his voice was finished, Han Woo Jin threw up the ball. It was the sign that he wasn't even going to give him time to get ready.

Pang!

The sound of the ball was crisp as the match began.

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Shin Sae Yeon looked at Han Woo Jin's figure that was walking up on the court as he wiped the sweat on his nose. His height at 177 cm wasn't that tall for tennis players. In fact, he was on the short side.

Of course, height wasn't an important factor for his skills, but it was an advantage that one could have. Most of the world rankers were above 180 cm. How far could he go?

Shin Sae Yeon listened to the announcer's loud voice and she suddenly turned her head because someone was sitting down next to her.

“[Ms. Shin, have you been well?]”

A familiar childish face. He had long arms that were suitable for a tennis player. It was the person who had a practice match with Han Woo Jin two weeks ago.

“[Player Okuta...]”

Okuta Ryusuke smiled as he heard her voice.

He looked like an immature yet happy kid.

“[Why are you here?]”

Shin Sae Yeon spoke expressionlessly. She didn't have any particular feelings for him. She just knew that Han Woo Jin was a little wary of him. To put it nicely, she had a dull impression of him; to put it badly, he simply didn't have good sense.

Okuta scratched the back of his head and answered, “[We haven't seen each other in a long time, why didn't you greet me? Also, do I need a reason to greet you?]”

“[I don't have anything to say to you.]”

“..”

Okuta couldn't say anything back to her. This wasn't her putting up walls, it was a complete ice wall. He felt like he got frostbite from her words. He thought she would open up once he poked her a bit, but that finger was frozen.

Of course, Shin Sae Yeon spoke without thinking. Since she only saw him once, she didn't have a reason to greet him.

Compared to her work qualifications, she lacked experience in socializing. She simply didn't know how to respond which is why she always had a poker face.

“[Mmm, I'm here to check on Han Woo Jin's skills. Coach Sato told me that I need to watch him play.]”

“[You mean Woo Jin?]”

Okuta nodded.

As soon as Okuta mentioned Han Woo Jin, his face turned serious. Shin Sae Yeon saw his change in expression and thought that he finally looked like a pro. He turned serious only when they spoke about tennis.

As soon as their conversation ended, they heard the announcer's voice to start the match. And almost immediately, they heard the sound of the ball get hit loudly on the court.

“[It’s begun.]”

“[Yes.]”

Half expectation and half curiosity.

Shin Sae Yeon looked at Han Woo Jin who had just served.

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Han Woo Jin hit the ball with all his strength from the beginning.

His level 12 serve was pretty high, and that probably made him the top in Korea. He couldn’t compare himself to world rankers since he hadn’t met any of them, but he had never seen anyone with a serve level that was over ten.

He only saw Choi Yeon Hyuk reach ten recently. However, it was different from Han Woo Jin.

‘If someone reaches level ten in their skill level, don’t they get a special skill? Or is it only for me?’

Choi Yeon Hyuk’s special skill was only a receive that he saw in his game with him. Ever since Choi Yeon Hyuk’s serve level hit ten, he saw Choi Yeon Hyuk’s status several times when they crossed paths, but he never received a special skill. Han Woo Jin realized that he still didn’t know his the full extent of his power.

Yet he knew one thing for sure. The fact that he was fully confident in his serve.

Pang!

The ball landed on Lee Yong Hoon’s side of the court but the ball flew past him before he could even respond. The game had just begun, but it started off with a service ace.

“15:0!”

The serve is the basic move that shows a strong attack and it showcases the player’s skills at the same time.

Lee Yong Woon’s face darkened after he saw his serve. It was necessary to distinguish

the opponent's skills and compare them to one's own skills. Lee Yong Woon immediately determined Han Woo Jin's high skill level even though it was just a serve.

Since Lee Yong Woon was a pro, he couldn't give up. Lee Yong Woon tightly gripped his racket and tried to continuously attempt to rally.

'He has a good mindset... But you can't win with just that.'

Who didn't know better than him? Han Woo Jin saw himself in Lee Yong Woon. He felt a little depressed but quickly erased those thoughts as he threw up the ball.

Pang!

This time, the ball was headed straight towards the middle instead of the side. Lee Yong Woon, who was about to move to the side, quickly moved back to his original position.

Tung!

The ball flew up high towards Woo Jin. Lee Yong Woon looked at the high flying ball and his facial expression was perplex compared to Han Woo Jin's expressionless face that simply just watched the ball. Han Woo Jin lifted his racket and fiercely swung downwards.

Pang!

"30:0!"

If his opponent made a mistake, he needed to punish him for it. After determining his weakness, he needed to immediately attack it. That was proper etiquette in sports. Not doing so would be showing pity for one's opponent. Han Woo Jin threw up the ball and Lee Yong Woon glared at him.

Han Woo Jin didn't need to use Sparrow in this game. His regular serve would be enough for this game.

If he controlled where the ball would land with his serve, it was impossible for players with slow reactions to be able to return his serve.

His serves landed on both sides of Lee Yong Woon's service court, so the game ended

very quickly.

“Game Han Woo Jin! 1-0!”

[Perfect game! You won a game against a pro so one random stat went up.]

He heard the notification in his head and he saw his physical stat go up by one. He felt his breathing slightly become lighter.

The two players passed by each other and switched sides. It was time to change courts and servers.

Han Woo Jin saw Lee Yong Woon’s veins pop out on his hands. He was probably holding back his frustration.

Anyone would be angry if they lost, and they would be happy if they won.

‘I have lived ten years filled with angriness. So don’t give in to your anger, and don’t worry about it too much.

‘If you’re going to give up now because of that, that means that this is your limit.

‘I will destroy you completely.’

If they had the same physical capabilities, then they would be able to rally back and forth, but that was not the case. Han Woo Jin could easily beat him.

“Second game, Lee Yong Woon serve!”

Lee Yong Woon fiercely threw up the ball. The difference in their serve level was too wide and so his serve came toward Han Woo Jin in an arc that was easy for him to predict where it would land.

Pang!

This serve was something even an amateur could return. Han Woo Jin waited for the right moment and hit the ball. He used the flat. Therefore, the bounce of the ball would be very high.

Pung!

Like a popped balloon, the ball bounced up way over Lee Yong Woon's head. Lee Yong Woon had no choice but to look at the ball that traveled all the way back to the service line.

“0:15!”

Return ace. When you wanted to show off the difference in skill level, aces were the best way to go about it. Service ace, return ace, or whatever ace; that was the best way to demoralize your opponent.

‘It’s over’

Lee Yong Woon’s eyes no longer had a fire in them as he gave up. Seeing that, Han Woo Jin clicked his tongue. Han Woo Jin was unsatisfied with this outcome. He didn’t want to see him give up. He wanted him to persist until the end.

Weak serve, heavy footsteps, and drooped shoulders.

He didn’t want to see his opponent’s distasteful figure any longer, which is why Han Woo Jin sped up.

Pang!

He was supposed to try with all his strength, but the serve came in a slow arc and Han Woo Jin was easily able to hit a return ace. 0:30.

He continued to serve with no strength and Han Woo Jin used a drop shot, which Lee Yong Woon hadn’t predicted. He tried to hit the ball but swung nothing but air. 0:40.

Han Woo Jin quickly earned three points and he hit the ball with a smash again. He was sorely disappointed with his opponent who couldn’t even react to his smash.

“Game Han Woo Jin! 2-0! Serve change!”

[Perfect game! Because you beat a pro in a game, your experience increased.]

[Your opponent lost his will to fight. Due to the large difference in skill, you will not receive as much experience.]

This announcement from the system made his bad mood even worse. That meant that

he would gain practically nothing when he played against opponents that were too weak. The notice from his status window didn't show exactly how much experience he gained, but he felt that his experience gain was negligible.

'It will now be difficult to improve skills with easy games. It'll be better for me to practice on my own rather than participate in low-level tournaments.'

He knew that he improved really easily so far, but it was human nature to become complacent and lazy after achieving a few minor feats. Han Woo Jin still had a long road to travel so he couldn't afford to become complacent.

It was his turn to serve again and he tightly gripped the green ball, throwing it up without any hesitation. Anyway, he first needed to finish this game first before he could organize his thoughts.

Pung!

The ball immediately flew over to the left service side of Lee Yong Woon's court. A useless service ace. He could either lament about his opponent's lack of fighting spirit or he could complain about the fact that his skills had improved too quickly.

This tennis match was no fun for Han Woo Jin and it was completely one-sided.

The referee only shouted out the score for Han Woo Jin and the audience that had come here for the match was completely silent.

As soon as the first set ended at 6-0, Lee Yong Woon went to the referee. Everyone knew what he was going to say.

Han Woo Jin coldly looked at him.

It was a very boring match. Was winning always like this?

"[Wow, it's already over.]"

Okuta spoke with his young voice as he looked over at the court. He had an excited look in his eyes as he stared at Han Woo Jin. That match just showed the vast difference between the two players and how good of a player Han Woo Jin was.

He felt like he now knew why Shin Sae Yeon was his agent.

“[You said it’s over?]”

“[Yes, there’s nothing left to see. His opponent is too weak, it’s obvious who will win.]”

He spoke as if he was in Han Woo Jin’s shoes. In fact, Okuta’s judgment was the same as Han Woo Jin’s: Lee Yong Woo’s skill level was too far behind.

It was only one game, but the skill level of the game was lower than he expected because Okuta was expecting a lot from Han Woo Jin, not his opponent.

“[Mr. Okuta.]”

Surprised, Okuta turned his head when he heard his name. The woman’s gaze was enough to make his heart waver.

“[Y-yes, Miss Shin?]”

“[... Mr. Okuta, what do you think about Mr. Woo Jin’s skills?]”

Contrary to Okuta’s expectations, Shin Sae Yeon asked about Han Woo Jin instead of him. Due to his false expectation of thinking she would ask about him, he sighed in disappointment. He felt that this pretty Korean agent had no feelings for him.

“[He’s kinda scary.]”

“[You’re scared?]”

Shin Sae Yeon expected an answer like his physical capabilities were good or that he had good techniques. Okuta saw Shin Sae Yeon’s face and explained his reasoning.

“[There are many players who are good at calculating plays. However, I have never seen someone who is such a hot-headed person like him.]”

Ah, and another thought came up. Okuta put up his index finger and pointed at his head and heart.

“[I think there’s a saying. Cool head but passionate heart.]”

“Ah...”

She put on an expression as if she kind of understood what he was saying, but not completely. Shin Sae Yeon couldn't say anything because she first needed to organize and understand what he had said to her. Okuta's silence didn't last long as he was interrupted.

[First set finish! Player Han Woo Jin won a perfect match against Lee Yong Woo!]

"Already..."

Shin Sae Yeon opened her mouth in astonishment because of how fast the game had ended. Okuta felt really bored while watching this game.

"[I'll see you later Miss Shin, I'm heading out now.]"

"[Yes, see you later.]"

Okuta left, and when he turned his head to see her look back at the court right away, Okuta felt a bit angry. He couldn't understand why. This was the first time Okuta had ever felt like this.

As Okuta left the stands, he looked at the player on the court with a sports cut.

'Han Woo Jin... It won't be easy to face him.'

Since his agent made him stop their game, he felt as if he had run away from their game and was sort of traumatized after that.

Okuta Ryusuke. 20.

Everyone said he had a bright future as a tennis player. Everyone exaggerated his future so he had high self-esteem, but he suddenly felt inferior because of Han Woo Jin.

•••

"Congrats on your win."

"Ah, thank you."

Han Woo Jin took the cold towel from Shin Sae Yeon and wiped his face. He wasn't

tired but the weather was very hot, so he sweat a lot. His mood improved because of the cold towel.

Shin Sae Yeon couldn't speak to him because Han Woo Jin looked depressed after he had won the game. A normal person would have been ecstatic, but his face showed unhappiness.

Shin Sae Yeon was confused as to why he looked unhappy even though he won.

Han Woo Jin wiped the sweat on his neck and gave it back to Shin Sae Yeon. She put the towel in her bag.

"I'm going to return to the hotel. You can stay here a bit longer or you can go sightsee and rest for a bit."

Not only the player, but an agent like Shin Sae Yeon was also very busy because she needed to analyze the players' games. She couldn't sleep until she gathered all the information about the other players.

After spending a bit of time with her, Han Woo Jin got to know Shin Sae Yeon a bit better.

'She's a bear that looks like a fox.'

Surprisingly, this woman who looked like she grew up privileged and well-off household seemed to be a workaholic. If one didn't tell her to take a break, she wouldn't take her hands off the papers.

Since she only focuses on work, she might be highly successful as a result. However, because she only works, she has bad communications skills and has bad relationships with her coworkers.

"Mr. Woo Jin."

"Yes?"

Even though he won so easily, he wasn't tired. The temperature was almost over 30 degrees Celsius and he had been running under the hot sun. He used up a lot of water from his body and his muscles were probably tired. Han Woo Jin stopped hearing Shin Sae Yeon's voice as she was about to head back to the hotel.

“Player Okuta was here earlier.”

“...He came to watch me play. What did he say?”

Han Woo Jin spoke in a low voice. It was a serious topic because it was about his opponent. The only person that he was worried about in this tournament was Okuta Ryusuke.

Shin Sae Yeon wondered how to say this and opened her mouth.

“He said he was a little scared. Do you know what he meant?”

“A little scared...”

‘It seems like he still wants to fight.’

Han Woo Jin roughly interpreted Okuta’s mind. Okuta said ‘a little’ — he was basically saying that Han Woo Jin’s skills were still not up to par with himself.

He liked that. Since he beat an opponent that lost the will to fight, he gained nothing. It was not common to have a chance to meet a talented player like Okuta.

His forehand double wasn’t a simple skill that anyone could just learn in 15 days.

“I don’t know what he means.”

“It’s probably nothing to be worried about. You should go rest. I’ll be back before dinner.”

“Yes.”

Shin Sae Yeon shook her small hand and Han Woo Jin watched her walk off the court.

The hotel was really close, so he did not need to use a car. The announcer’s loud voice that proclaimed the start of the next game hit his ears.

•••

The time after that flowed like water throughout his simple schedule.

After he passed the first round, Han Woo Jin went to the hotel right away and rested. He ate and went to sleep. Training during a tournament was something that one should never do.

He needed to give his muscles at least 48 hours to completely rest from muscle fatigue.

He had plenty of time to rest after his first match, but after matches every day following that.

If he accidentally hurt himself while training, then the useless physical activity would become his enemy.

Han Woo Jin just did simple exercises and concentrated on not losing his senses for tennis.

‘Player Okuta also easily won his first match. The score was 6-1 and 6-2.’

Shin Sae Yeon watched all of the games and she analyzed him. According to her, he didn’t use his forehand double style. Maybe he didn’t want to show his complete technique yet.

He just roughly observed the other players.

Han Woo Jin had the special power which allowed him to see players’ skills. He could confidently state that only Okuta had the possibility of beating him.

Shin Sae Yeon discovered Han Woo Jin’s attitude toward the other players and saw that he didn’t care about them. So she stopped talking about them. Maybe she understood that Han Woo Jin’s skills were above the average skill level of the players in this tournament.

July 23rd.

Han Woo Jin’s second match soon arrived. Han Woo Jin’s match was the first in the top 16 tournament.

His opponent was Kim Jin Hyun who was in his thirties. Although he was over thirty, he played energetically. However, his skills weren’t that great.

Han Woo Jin saw him and it reminded him of his past self. Even though his past was

what allowed him to become what he was today, he still refused to acknowledge it.

Han Woo Jin was surprised because Kim Jin Hyun suddenly spoke to him.

“Are you Han Woo Jin? You’re so young but you’re so good.”

“Ah, yes... thank you.”

Nobody spoke to him that amiably so he talked to him in a perplexed tone. Kim Jin Hyun walked over and sat next to him.

‘What is he doing?’

Kim Jin Hyun smiled at Han Woo Jin who was looking at him with a nervous expression. He took something out from his pocket.

It was an analog picture.

“I hope you don’t think this is weird, but can you talk to her? This is my daughter.”

It was an old picture where player Kim Jin Hyun holding a small baby. Han Woo Jin, wondering why he showed him this picture, just looked at his face.

Kim Jin Hyun simply smiled and put it back into his pocket.

“My daughter is a bit sick... I think this might be my last tournament. I’m perfectly fine with losing to a talented player like you.”

No matter how you saw it, this story would bring tears to a person.

Since he didn’t have that great of an experience and was over 30 years old, if he took a prolonged leave from tennis, it would be impossible for him to return as a pro.

In his past, Han Woo Jin never skipped a single tennis season and kept on playing. But if he took some time off, he probably would have been kicked out because he was bad.

However, Han Woo Jin’s face was like steel when he heard his story because he had heard of this type of story many times in the past.

“...Then please do your best.”

“Yes?”

Han Woo Jin laughed at Kim Jin Hyun’s dumbfounded expression as if he hadn’t expected this type of outcome. Han Woo Jin didn’t like players who did these types of things.

Chapter 10

The Top 16

Kim Jin Hyun was about to say something, but the announcer's voice was quicker. It was a loud voice which thundered through the microphone.

[Now we will begin the first round of the top 16 matches. We have NK company's Han Woo Jin and Osung Electricity Company's Kim Jin Hyun! Everyone, please welcome these two players with a round of applause!]

Han Woo Jin didn't want to talk to him anymore. He left Kim Jin Hyun behind and walked over to the court first. He knew what he was going to say to him. He was probably going to say something along the lines of him wanting his children to have good memories and blah blah blah in order to get him to sympathize with him.

Ah, of course, he didn't think everything that he said was a lie. It was possible that his child was actually sick, and it was possible that this was his last tournament.

'You shouldn't bring outside problems onto the court.'

That was what Han Woo Jin thought.

That was how he had lived so far. That was also why he acted icily to others when they were like that because he did that to himself too.

Could he win just because his child is sick?

Could he win because this might be his last tournament?

No way.

Victory didn't come to beggars.

Winning came from effort, anger, frustration, grit, nervousness, and joy. Han Woo Jin had no intention of thinking poorly about player Kim Jin Hyun's strategy, but he also had no intention of respecting him.

Han Woo Jin looked back at Kim Jin Hyun who followed him and saw his status.

[Kim Jin Hyun]

Strength 48 / Stamina 52 / Agility 45

HP 1920/2080 SP 360/360

Forehand: 7/20

Backhand: 4/20

Serve: 6/20

Volley: 4/20

Smash: 6/20

Drop Shot: 5/20

Lob: 4/20

Special Skill: None

There wasn't much of a difference between him and Lee Yong Woon whom he played against in the first round. That meant that he could easily win against him without showing his true skills.

Han Woo Jin gazed at Kim Jin Hyun like a machine and examined him. Kim Jin Hyun noticed his stare — he and felt scared and uncomfortable.

'Huh... this guy isn't easy.'

He was still in his early thirties but Han Woo Jin's look was not something that belonged to someone in their twenties. He felt the way that he was looking at him was as if he were sharpening a knife.

Kim Jin Hyun totally gave up on the notion of trying to make him sympathize with him. That kind of psychological warfare wouldn't work on him. A person with those kinds of eyes wasn't easy to deal with.

The two players went to their spots on the court and the referee began speaking.

[It's time to decide who will serve first. Both players, please come forward.]

Their eyes met. Both of them faced each other as if their opponent wasn't a threat. They weren't intimidated by each other and only had thoughts of winning. The two players arrived at the net and the referee spoke again.

"Please choose heads or tails."

"Can I choose?"

"Yes."

They no longer thought about psychological warfare. As soon as Han Woo Jin agreed, Kim Jin Hyun chose tails without hesitation. Han Woo Jin automatically got heads and they both took one step back because they didn't want to get hit by the coin.

The referee flipped his thumb up and tossed the coin.

Ping!

The coin rotated in the air and quickly dropped back down toward the ground. The referee put out his hand and caught the coin. It was tails.

"I'll serve first."

"Yes."

With a short exchange, they both returned to the service line. Han Woo Jin stood in position behind the service line and Kim Jin Hyun grabbed the balls. He slowly walked toward the baseline.

[Player Kim Jin Hyun will be serving first! As soon as you guys are ready, you can start!]

"Player ready! Kim Jin Hyun to serve!"

Han Woo Jin lowered his back and Kim Jin Hyun straightened his body. Their positions represented those of a server and a receiver.

“0:0! Play!”

Kim Jin Hyun tossed the ball up as soon as the referee signaled for the beginning of the match. It couldn't be considered a foul but it was a good skill to be able to serve as soon as the referee signaled the start.

Pang!

It was a loud noise. A perfectly hit ball would emit a clean sound. The ball hit the racket's sweet spot and went over towards Han Woo Jin's side of the court. It was a straight and precise serve.

Yet it wasn't enough for Han Woo Jin.

‘He's acting like how I used to act.’

Han Woo Jin smiled bitterly. His playstyle was exactly the same as his except for the part where he tried to get him to sympathize with him. He tried to bluff and trick him. It wasn't a type of skill that he used now in the present because his skills had advanced so much that he no longer needed it.

It had been a while since he had seen these types of moves so his body reacted in excitement. He swung his racket like he was about to hit the ball with a huge motion, but it suddenly stopped.

It was a perfect drop shot.

Tong!

“Ugh...!”

Nobody could react to an unexpected drop shot because of the huge swing they see from their opponents. It might've been different if it was a serve volley. Since he was standing at the baseline, Kim Jin Hyun couldn't receive the ball.

He ran with all his might but the ball had already bounced twice in front of him.

“0:15!”

Losing the first point in vain, Kim Jin Hyun clicked his tongue. Han Woo Jin's play was

like that of a veteran player. He couldn't understand how he could have the mentality of a veteran pro player at his young age.

'Don't think about other things.'

He just concentrated and grabbed the ball. He couldn't do a service ace so he thought he could do a serve where he could easily return the ball.

Pang!

The ball landed on the left side of the service court. Han Woo Jin was ready to hit the ball before it even landed. This time, it was a backhand drive with a topspin.

Pang!

His improved muscles made the hit more powerful than usual. Han Woo Jin hit the ball so powerfully that it went beyond his estimate, so he thought the rally was over. However, the ball came back with a weak return.

Tong!

"Uh?"

The ball rolled in front of the surprised Han Woo Jin.

Kim Jin Hyun was able to return the ball that he thought he couldn't be returned.

"15:15!"

He was shocked that he was able to return it.

'Did I underestimate him? How could I do that?'

Han Woo Jin bit his lower lip. He tightened his mind that was currently like loose shoelaces.

Since when did he act like a strong person?

'Han Woo Jin, get your act together.'

Kim Jin Hyun tossed the ball up once again. His serve was hit overhead, but it didn't have much strength.

Tung!

The ball barely passed the net and landed in the service court. This kind of serve had a low bounce to it, so it was hard to return. Only veteran players could use this type of technique.

However, in terms of veteran skills, Han Woo Jin did not lack them. Han Woo Jin returned the ball with the low bounce to Kim Jin Hyun's court and won the point. It had a powerful topspin which gave his opponent almost no time to respond, but Kim Jin Hyun still almost hit the ball with his racket.

“15:30!”

Now Han Woo Jin rearranged his thoughts about Kim Jin Hyun. He had much more resilience than Lee Yong Woon. He was a cunning pro that was extremely tenacious.

‘Was my type this annoying? A person who isn't used to this kind of playstyle would have a hard time.’

The numbers in the status window didn't represent true abilities. Kim Jin Hyun and Han Woo Jin's playstyle had a special quality that was immeasurable. Their talent was something that could not be expressed in numbers.

He was too overconfident after he had looked at the stats; he didn't carefully measure his opponent.

Kim Jin Hyun's playstyle gave him a moral lesson. Han Woo Jin threw away his arrogance. He didn't seem like a very good player off the court, but on the contrary, he was respectably a pro on the court.

‘Should I play properly now?’

Han Woo Jin slightly relaxed his cold face. His body that was tight slowly loosened up so that he could release his true skill. He felt his body's gear go up one notch.

Pang!

Kim Jin Hyun's serve this time was a straight flat. It was different from the earlier rallies. The speed and direction were completely different and it was kind of difficult to receive. However, the server also had to put a lot of energy into making the serve precise so as not to fault.

This was something that even Han Woo Jin could do which was why he was able to return it. He quickly ran and swung his racket horizontally. The ball hit the center of the racket which resulted in an increase in momentum. Before Kim Jin Hyun could react, the ball had already bounced out of the court.

“15:40!”

Hearing the referee's voice announce the score, Han Woo Jin looked over at the scoreboard.

This rally showed the two players' difference in skill. The serve that he didn't expect to be returned with Rising showed that the rally was in the palm of Han Woo Jin's hand.

What was the expression on his opponent face?

Defeat? Sorrow? Despair? No expression? Several thoughts came up in his head and quickly disappeared.

Kim Jin Hyun didn't show any of those expressions — he just glared at him with his eyes.

‘...Good, that's how it's supposed to be.’

His eyes glared at Han Woo Jin and showed his fighting spirit. It showed that he wouldn't give up until the end of the match. Without caring about the difference in skill, he would keep on fighting back, and that was an opponent that made him excited.

‘He's serving again.’

Han Woo Jin lowered his stance. The skill difference was large, but he wasn't an opponent that he could go easy on.

He might have to use a lot of stamina. Regardless, Han Woo Jin kept smiling.

‘This is what a tournament should be like.’

It was a world where you couldn’t rest and had to keep on running.

Han Woo Jin hated winning easy matches.

The adrenaline released into his body pumped his hot blood.

There were many viewers in the stands at the Seogwipo Tennis Courts, but they were all silently watching. You could only hear the sound of the ball getting hit.

Han Woo Jin’s racket hit the ball once again. Although he didn’t use a two-handed swing, his swing was very wide and it was very powerful. Kim Jin Hyun tried to receive the ball, but he stopped.

The ball bounced in a completely different direction two steps away from him. It was a ball that bounced to his side.

Kim Jin Hyun angrily glared at the ball.

“Game Han Woo Jin! 5-0! Switch sides!”

The referee spoke and the two exchanged positions.

Compared to Kim Jin Hyun whose legs were trembling, Han Woo Jin simply wiped his sweat. It was easy to tell who was currently leading the game.

They both walked in totally different styles and passed by each other by the net. Han Woo Jin looked over at the other side and was really impressed.

‘His body stamina was already past his limit in the first set but he still kept on going...’

Han Woo Jin was able to accurately gauge his opponent’s condition better than anyone else. At this moment he knew that Kim Jin Hyun’s stamina was at its lowest.

[Kim Jin Hyun] [Exhausted]

Strength 48 (-15) / Stamina 52 (-15) / Agility 45 (-15)

HP 350/2080

It wouldn't be surprising if he suddenly fainted on the court. Yet Kim Jin Hyun still kept on walking. He staggered on over but the direction was straight.

Finally, Kim Jin Hyun arrived at his side.

Nobody laughed or cursed at his slowness. Rather, people were rooting for him.

But could he even hear it right now?

Han Woo Jin expected Kim Jin Hyun's five senses to be completely screwed up right now.

His eyesight should be blurry and ears should be ringing. He probably couldn't feel the pain in his muscles anymore either. It was exactly how he felt during his match with Choi Yeon Hyuk back then.

"Should I end it?"

He mumbled.

His opponent had amazing fighting spirit. Since Han Woo Jin tried to not lose a single game, his opponent ran like crazy all over the court. Kim Jin Hyun's actions of trying to fill up the gap in skill with his fighting spirit moved the referee and the audience.

However, Han Woo Jin wasn't the type of person to be moved by his performance. Han Woo Jin decided that it was time to kick things up a notch so as to make him unable to keep up anymore.

Slowly but surely, as the match progressed, Kim Jin Hyun's stamina showed that he couldn't take much more. It was the result of him making up for his lack of stamina with his skills. His breathing was completely messed up by the end of the first set and his muscles reached their limits.

If they didn't stop the game soon, Kim Jin Hyun would not only be risking injury, but he could also suffer from severe after effects that could last a long time. That's why Han Woo Jin thought that he needed to beat him immediately.

"Han Woo Jin serve! Play!"

If he won this game, it would be over.

Han Woo Jin threw the ball up high because he wanted Kim Jin Hyun to rest. The toss' height wasn't ordinary.

He was in a ready position and his body twisted diagonally.

You could hear the sound of his hand cracking.

His starting position for his serve was enough for the audience to realize and be curious about his actions.

He must use Sparrow.

That's what Han Woo Jin thought and decided on it. He thought that Kim Jin Hyun wouldn't give up unless he saw something overwhelming.

If he kept on using regular serves that were returnable, then he might keep on playing and get a big injury. Then Han Woo Jin might feel guilty.

All in all, Kim Jin Hyun's skills were almost the same as Lee Yong Woon's, but their game had already gone on for over an hour. He remembered that his game with Lee Yong Woon didn't even pass 30 minutes, so Han Woo Jin thought that Kim Jin Hyun was at least twice as strong as Lee Yong Woo.

He was ready to use the serve that nobody could receive except for Choi Yeon Hyuk. As the ball fell down, he twisted his whole body and you could hear a loud snap.

Pabang!

The ball immediately hit the court as soon as the racket hit the ball. That serve was as fast as lightning and no one could see the direction that it had gone in.

It was at a speed where it was impossible for Kim Jin Hyun to even react.

“15:0!”

Kim Jin Hyun let his racket drop and he let out a self-deprecating laugh.

He realized that he could no longer go on. Yet he didn't give up just yet. He wanted to keep on going until the end. He stared at Han Woo Jin's figure that was starting to serve.

Pang!

“30:0!”

It was an ordinary serve. He hit the ball towards the side, but Kim Jin Hyun couldn't receive it because he couldn't move his legs. How pitiful was it that he could only blankly stare at the ball as it passed by? Han Woo Jin could imagine what he was going through. That's why he wanted to finish the game as soon as possible.

Pang!

“40:0! Han Woo Jin match point!”

It was time to end it. Kim Jin Hyun just waited for the last ball with a despondent and face of acceptance. Han Woo Jin felt a mysterious sense of heaviness on his shoulders as he looked at that man in his thirties.

Was that what he was like in his past? He no longer knew what he was like.

Han Woo Jin finally his last serve.

The ball quickly landed on the other side of the court and passed by his opponent. At that moment, the referee waved his arm and signaled the end of the match.

“Game set match! Victor Han Woo Jin! Score 6-0. 6-0!”

The audience's applause was like roaring thunder as the referee announced the end. It was a tremendously loud sound even though there were only 100 people. Han Woo Jin and Kim Jin Hyun were both very surprised and looked at the stands.

“Player KIm Jin Hyun! You were awesome!”

“Woo Jin~! You need to take it easy!”

“You guys are the best!”

Naturally, the player who played their best would get congratulated.

Kim Jin Hyun didn't care about his body's condition and kept on fighting extremely tenaciously against a strong opponent. Additionally, Han Woo Jin played his best

without underestimating his opponent. The viewers who were looking at both players had a strange impression and didn't say anything else.

Now that the game was over, the audience was finally able to open their mouths as they cheered.

The two players walked up to the net and shook their hands without saying anything. The sensation of shaking a sweaty hand wasn't good, but it wasn't that bad.

“You’re outrageously good. I can’t believe you’re a newbie.”

“It’s nothing much, you were great as well.”

Han Woo Jin’s way of speaking was very respectful. It was natural for him to show respect to a player that had given it his all. Even though he tried to use psychological warfare against him before the match, he showed that he was an excellent tennis player on the court.

Han Woo Jin was about to leave, but he suddenly stopped. He thought about the words that Kim Jin Hyun had said to him before that match.

He asked Kim Jin Hyun carefully.

“The words you said earlier, how much of it was true?”

Hearing those words, Kim Jin Hyun’s facial expression turned into one of depression. Seeing his expression, Han Woo Jin’s heart churned. Even if what he said was true, Han Woo Jin still would have won, but there would have been some doubt on his mind and that was different.

Kim Jin Hyun opened his mouth with a face that looked like it was about to cry. His voice was very dark.

“The fact that my daughter is sick is true up to that point.”

“Mm... I’m sorry.”

“She caught a cold yesterday. It seemed like she kicked off her blanket yesterday and got sick.”

“...yes?” Han Woo Jin said in surprise after hearing his words. Kim Jin Hyun laughed.

It was a face that looked very slappable.

“Haha! I thought you were a cold guy! I guess you’re not! You’re pretty funny, Mr. Han Woo Jin!”

“...Haa... you lied?”

“It wasn’t a lie, my daughter is sick.”

‘His daughter is sick, which is true, so he technically didn’t lie. The problem was that his face looked unhappy and dark as he spoke as if his daughter were a cancer patient that didn’t have that much longer to live.

Han Woo Jin sighed in relief.

Kim Jin Hyun laughed and patted Han Woo Jin’s shoulder before he turned his body.

It looked like Kim Jin Hyun’s Andong Futures was stopping here. Han Woo Jin wanted to ask him one more thing and spoke to his turned back.

“Mr. Kim Jin Hyun, was this really your last tournament?”

At that question, Kim Jin Hyun turned his body around.

His face lifted upwards into a detestable smirk.

“Hell no! Why would I quit doing something so fun at my young age? I’m going to keep on playing tennis even when I’m in a nursery home.”

Han Woo Jin couldn’t help but laugh.

“Puch!”

His laughter traveled up from inside his stomach and it quickly escaped out his mouth. It was a sound that was mixed with happiness and despondency.

“I’m happy you smiled. There were some people who were really angry because of what I said to them before the matches.”

“I think it was a good game regardless of what you said before the match.”

He scratched the back of his head and spoke. Han Woo Jin stopped smiling and answered seriously. Regardless of what he did outside of the court, he was a competent tennis player without any shame on the court.

Of course, there would be many people who would curse him. Only those who lacked actual skills would try attacking their opponent mentally. However, it was simply Kim Jin Hyun’s desperate struggle because of his lack of skill.

At least, Han Woo Jin couldn’t say anything to him because he also had gone through the same phase.

The two players finally left the court. He saw Shin Sae Yeon who was waiting for him and he waved his hand with a happy look on his face. This was his second match with a perfect score.

On the next day, Han Woo Jin was surprised by something that was out of his expectations.



PtFF by: tr4t4rA7EN